

THE
SINISTER
MARK

LEE THAYER

THE SINISTER MARK

BOOKS BY LEE THAYER



Q. E. D.

THAT AFFAIR AT "THE CEDARS"
THE MYSTERY OF THE THIRTEENTH FLOOR
THE SINISTER MARK
THE UNLATCHED DOOR

THE SINISTER MARK

BY
LEE THAYER



GARDEN CITY NEW YORK
DOUBLEDAY, PAGE & COMPANY
1923

R
K
1337
SL



COPYRIGHT, 1923, BY
DOUBLEDAY, PAGE & COMPANY
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED, INCLUDING THAT OF TRANSLATION
INTO FOREIGN LANGUAGES, INCLUDING THE SCANDINAVIAN

COPYRIGHT, 1923, BY THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES
AT
THE COUNTRY LIFE PRESS, GARDEN CITY, N. Y.

First Edition

JUN 18 '23

©C1A704929

201

TO
H. W. T.

IN GRATEFUL ACKNOWLEDGMENT
OF HIS FINAL APPROVAL

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. "MARY BLAKE"	I
II. AN UNSTAMPED LETTER	12
III. PETER CLANCY.	21
IV. A VIEWLESS ROOM	30
V. CAMOUFLAGE?	37
VI. "MY SISTER, ANNE——"	45
VII. A SPLASH OF BLOOD	49
VIII. THE VOICE OVER THE WIRE	58
IX. WHAT THE CABMAN KNEW	71
X. A BIG TRUNK	80
XI. FOUR PHOTOGRAPHS	90
XII. A SIGNATURE CARD	101
XIII. THE WOMAN AT THE PENNSYLVANIA HOTEL	112
XIV. ONE CLUE	120

CHAPTER		PAGE
XV.	THE DUPLICATE KEY	129
XVI.	ROSAMOND CURWOOD	148
XVII.	ANOTHER PHOTOGRAPH	165
XVIII.	ROSAMOND'S SECRET	176
XIX.	IN THE OLD PHOTOGRAPH GALLERY	184
XX.	PETER CLANCY CHANGES HIS PLANS—	195
XXI.	—AND ASKS A QUESTION	206
XXII.	“ON MONDAY—THE TWENTY-NINTH OF MAY——”	218
XXIII.	A MIDNIGHT ERRAND	227
XXIV.	“HANDS UP!”	237
XXV.	A HIGH WALL	248
XXVI.	THE WOMAN SHULTZE	258
XXVII.	111 WEST FORTY — STREET	269
XXVIII.	DONALD MORRIS UNDERSTANDS	281
XXIX.	KATE RUTHERFORD RELIEVES HER MIND	288

THE SINISTER MARK

THE SINISTER MARK

CHAPTER I

“MARY BLAKE”

TELL me, Mary!”

The woman stirred slightly, and with her strong, fine hand pushed her coffee cup away. She hesitated and looked down at the heavily shaded light which threw a rosy gleam upon the white tablecloth. Then her troubled glance travelled swiftly about the room, scarcely noting, at the other tables, the eager or bored faces, dimly lit; here and there a splash of colour on a salient jaw and chin, a flush on a bare, powdered shoulder, the rest melting into carefully designed obscurity, in which soft-footed waiters passed back and forth, ubiquitous, silent, and attentive. Her eyes came to rest, at last, on the face of her companion, but her firm red lips remained closed.

“Something is troubling you, Mary. I can see it plainly,” the man insisted. His voice was low and deep, thrilling with an emotion which was reflected in his strong bronzed face. “Tell me about it. Let me help you. I——”

She interrupted him with a motion of her hand.

"It's nothing that you can help, Donald," she said, slowly, bitterly. "'Fate stacks the cards,' my father used to say, 'and few of us have the courage to overturn the table.' I wonder——"

She paused. There was a strange light in her fathomless eyes. The man opposite her leaned intently forward and strove in vain to plumb their depths. They had fascinated him from the first—those strange gold-gray eyes—more than her beautiful, mobile face, more, even, than her wonderful voice. There had always been in them a veiled expression of mystery, a something unexplained and unexplainable, a hint of tragedy which consorted oddly with her amazing success on the stage, before the most critical audience, perhaps, in the world.

The fact that, in spite of her great achievements, in spite of her immense popularity, he alone, so far as he knew, had gained any degree of intimacy, thrilled Donald Van Loo Morris, cosmopolitan man of the world as he certainly was, more than, up to this time, he would have cared to admit even to himself. The long line of his stiff Dutch ancestry fought with the artistic temperament which he had inherited from a sporadic *mésalliance*, late in the last century, and so far had had the upper hand. Though he had realized for some time that all his senses were intrigued and all his mind filled with the fascination of her charm and the loveliness of her spirit, the thought of an alliance

with a woman, world-famed, and yet in a sense unknown, had held his ardour in check. She was called Mary Blake by the world at large. He had surprised her into admitting that this was only her stage name, but when he eagerly sought to push this slight advantage, she had withdrawn, almost visibly, into that realm of silence which habitually enshrouded her.

That was months ago, and since then, though he had seen her as often as she would permit, he had learned nothing of her antecedents nor of her life preceding her first appearance on the stage. He was too conventional, too considerate, perhaps, to question openly, and though her manner was spontaneous and direct, so far as the present was concerned, there was no scaling the wall of her reserve, in which he had been able to find not the smallest loophole or crevice.

Always there had been a shadow in her eyes, and of late Donald Morris was sure that the shadow had strengthened and deepened. Always he had felt hers to be a sensitive, high-strung nature, overwrought. The demands of her profession and the emotional rôles which she played would account for much, but there was a tenseness about her always, and especially to-night, a note almost of hysteria, which in a person of her vitality was scarcely explainable even by the strain of a long season, culminating in the closing triumphs of the evening.

She had resolutely, and with fixed determination,

refused the ovation which her manager had planned, and after the final fall of the curtain, before the last of the enthusiastic audience had left the theatre, she had slipped quietly away with him—a triumph for him which he felt more keenly than anything in his previous experience.

The blood ran hotly in his veins as he gazed across the narrow table into her eyes. The tragedy and appeal, suddenly and completely unmasked, which cried out to him from their depths swept every worldly consideration from his heart.

He leaned farther forward and laid his brown hand upon the white one which was clenched upon the table.

“What is it, Mary?” he questioned, almost fiercely. “There’s something new—some anxiety. What is it, dear? You must tell me. You must let me protect——” He broke off suddenly and his voice dropped low. “I love you, Mary. I love you. I’d do anything in the world to serve you. You must——”

Abruptly Mary Blake drew back her hand and rose. With the same trembling hand she drew closer the filmy white scarf which floated about her throat, and before he could reach her side, she caught up the light cloak which lay upon the back of her chair and wrapped herself from head to foot in its soft folds.

“I must go,” she whispered, trembling as with sudden cold. “It’s late, Donald, and I’m very tired.

Don't—oh, don't say any more to-night. I can't bear——”

They passed out through the crowded restaurant and automatically both faces slipped on the mask which must be worn before the indifferent herd. Many eyes followed them in their passage down the room. Though their faces were somewhat obscured by the bizarre lighting of the place, at least one of them had been recognized by more than a few.

“Mary Blake,” whispered a heavy-featured man with a freshly scraped jowl like that of a very clean pig, as he leaned across to his vis-à-vis, whose bobbed hair shone like the evening primrose in the dusk. “Been to see her three times in ‘Dark Roads.’ Closed to-night, or I'd take you, girlie, though maybe you wouldn't like it anyway. Pretty high-brow, even for me,” and he smoothed his slippery dark hair complacently. He felt, strenuously, that he knew what he knew. “Great artist, that,” he ruminated, gazing after the retreating figures. “Poor old Quinn knew how to pick 'em out of the atmosphere, somehow. Pity he had to kick-in after her first season, but Mary Blake was a lucky girl to have him for a manager in the start-off. They say Fred Jones has made a pot of money out of ‘Dark Roads’ and, of course, she's the whole show. Quinn's training was worth everything to her, naturally, but the girl has talent, genius even——”

The primrose one was scarcely listening.

“Who's the man?” she interrupted, a trifle im-

patiently. Even in her not-too-discriminating eyes there was a sharp contrast between the man who had just passed and the perfumed self-complacency who had done her the honour of taking her to an after-theatre supper.

“That?” queried her companion. “Oh, that’s Don Morris—Donald Van Loo Morris.” He rolled the name on his tongue. “Real class he is, girlie, so don’t get any little heart flutters about him. Belongs to all the old families in New York. His sister is Mrs. Francis Atterbury—see her pictures in all the society papers. Holds the record for being the only person who has ever had the honour of showing off the Blake in captivity. Yep! Mary gave a reading in Mrs. Atterbury’s house in Gramercy Park early last fall, and nobody else has been able to get near the girl with a ten-foot pole before or since. Some exclusive, she is! Clever little devil,” he chuckled. “Knows how to enhance her popularity. Bet Quinn shot it into her good and strong that a successful beginner ought to be seen off-stage as little as possible. Never have seen her myself except across the footlights, and once in a while at some quiet restaurant, or a place like this which maybe isn’t any too quiet, but it’s sort of dim and one doesn’t attract too much attention, eh, girlie? Else would I be here, what?” and he laughed fatly.

The girl wrinkled up her baby nose.

“Oh, quit your kiddin’,” she said, petulantly, “and tell me some more about the tall, good-lookin’

guy. He's my idea of what a real gentleman ought to look like, he sure is. What does he do for a living, or don't he do anything or anybody?"

"Not any," grinned the other. "At least, I believe he's a sculptor or something on the side, but he has oodles of money—so he should worry! Mary Blake's a wise little gold-digger, all right, if she does pretend that Violet is her middle name. Now there's nothing of the shrinking flowerette about you, girlie, and that's what I could care for, believe me! You're the only——"

Unmindful of the attention they had attracted, Mary Blake and her escort passed out into the cool night air. The light rain which blew in through the open end of the gay awning was refreshing after the close atmosphere of the restaurant, and Donald Morris raised his head and let the rain drift in upon his upturned face. Mary Blake's head was bent and shadowed by her broad, drooping black hat, so that he could not see the expression of her face when she said:

"Let me go home alone, Donald, please. Just put me in a taxi and——"

"Absolutely impossible, my dear girl, at this time of night," he said, firmly, though his face was uncertain and anxious.

He motioned to one in gaudy uniform who stood close by, and instantly, out of the darkness, a cab rolled up and stopped, and the gaudy one threw open the door.

“I won’t trouble you, Mary,” Morris whispered, hastily. “But I must come with you and see you safe. Mary, oh, Mary——” His lips closed, but his eyes spoke on.

With a slight shrug and a deep intake of the breath, the woman bent her tall head and preceded him into the waiting cab.

“Ninety-nine Waverly Place.”

Morris gave the direction with almost the assured familiarity with which one gives one’s own, and yet the thought crossed his mind briefly, as it had many times before, that he had never been beyond the broad old door of Ninety-nine Waverly Place. . . . Why? . . . He had suggested it more than once, as plainly as he dared, but the suggestion had always been evaded or ignored. It was not on the score of propriety, of that he was certain. She lived with her sister. They would not have been alone. He had always felt that her apartment would tell him something of her inner life, that inner life which he knew now, at last, concerned him so deeply; for the phrase which had come unbidden to his lips was true. He loved her—loved her more than anything in the world. Nothing else mattered.

His gaze was fixed on the beautiful profile which could be seen now and then as the misty street lights flashed past. There had been no sound within the cab after the slamming of the door.

Mary Blake sat slightly forward on the cushions, gazing, with unseeing eyes, straight ahead. Her

small head was held erect now, but there was something tense in its pose, something taut in her whole attitude which suggested the drawn bow. Her hands were tightly clasped upon her knees. After a long time, Donald Morris spoke.

“I won’t trouble you, Mary. I won’t ask any more questions, but—I meant what I said. You must have seen it coming. You must have known—oh, you beautiful, dear, wonderful girl, I love you. I want you to be my wife, Mary. My——”

“No, no, Donald! Stop, oh, stop,” she gasped. “Don’t—don’t—not to-night——” Her breath came short and quick. “I’m to blame—to blame. I—I don’t know what to say to you. I don’t know whether to—— But no. You could never . . . oh, I can’t talk! Not to-night! It’s been a long season, and I’m tired—so tired.”

There was no hint of fatigue in her poised figure, but in her voice was all the way-worn wistful weariness of the ages.

The cab reached Washington Square, turned to the left, and stopped, and a grimy hand stretched leisurely back and opened the door.

“Wait,” said Donald Morris, briefly, as he alighted and gave his hand to the woman who quickly followed him.

Silently he received her keys, unlocked and opened the door of the dark vestibule and the door of the hall. A faint light burned inside, and by it he could just distinguish the white oval of her face, the wild, bitter

tragedy in the curving lips and great shadowed eyes.

He closed the door and caught both her hands in his.

“Let me come up with you, Mary,” he cried, “if only for a moment. I can’t leave you like this. Your sister will be waiting up for you?”

“She—she hasn’t gone to bed yet. It isn’t that,” Mary replied in a shaken voice. There was always a strange note in her voice when she was forced to speak of her sister. It was there now, stronger than ever. Subconsciously, it registered itself on Morris’s mind, though at the moment he paid no heed. He was to remember it later.

“You’re trembling, Mary! You’re shivering as if you were frightened,” he cried, anxiously. “What is it, dear?”

Again she shuddered, and drawing one hand away, covered her face.

“It’s nothing, nothing, Donald.” She tried to laugh. “Someone walking over my grave, perhaps,” she added, lightly. Then, under her breath, “Over my grave . . . I wonder. . . .” She caught her lip between her teeth and swiftly pulled herself together.

“Good-night, Donald. Thank you for all your kindness—your—everything. And leave me now. If you—care—go now, at once, while I have——”

For a flash her eyes were upon him. What he saw in them took his breath. With a cry he caught her

close in his arms and held her fast. Wildly heart beat against heart, conquering lips pressed lips which yielded in passionate surrender.

But only for a moment, though that moment seemed a lifetime to both.

With shaking hand she pushed him from her, and without another word sped up the shadowy stair.

CHAPTER II

AN UNSTAMPED LETTER

FOLLOWED, for Donald Morris, two sleepless nights.

The first was spent in living over again, moment by thrilling moment, the events and emotions of the previous evening.

The days of indecision, when worldly considerations were weighed in the balance with his growing love for Mary Blake, seemed far away, and almost inconceivable, so overwhelming had his passion become. Whatever her antecedents had been, whatever her past, he was ready now to face any future so long as it should be spent at her side. The trouble that threatened her, if trouble there was, would be as nothing to him, no matter what its nature, if he were allowed to share it. Every selfish thought was swept away in the great tide of emotion which buoyed him up and made him feel the master and ruler of circumstance.

On the Sunday morning, as soon as convention would allow it, he had called Mary Blake on the telephone to beg for an immediate interview.

She had answered him quietly but finally. She would not see him for the present. She made no

explanation, gave no reasons, and in the midst of his protestations she had quietly cut off the connection, leaving him hurt, anxious, and apprehensive.

These feelings had grown upon him during the morning to such an extent that before noon he had decided to brave her displeasure and attempt an interview.

The pace of the swiftly moving cab that bore him southward seemed all too slow, so anxious had he become. Gone now was the feeling of invincibility of the early morning. A vague but almost unbearable sense of uneasiness and alarm pursued him, try as he would to reason it away.

When he had climbed the three flights of stairs of the old apartment at Waverly Place, his fears were not allayed by the silence that followed his repeated knocking. Once he had called through the door: "Mary, Mary!" and in the stillness that ensued he had an uneasy sense of a presence near him, a feeling that there was someone inside the apartment, listening. He could never tell on what this assumption was based, for there had been no recognizable sound, and though he renewed his efforts, there had been no answer.

Forced, at last, to abandon his attempt to see her, he left the apartment and wandered about the streets, in a frame of mind to which, in all his fortunate and successful life, he had been a stranger.

Many times during the ensuing afternoon and evening he had attempted to get her apartment on

the wire. The first report was that the line was busy and after that, each time he called, the operator made the same reply—"Party doesn't answer."—And Donald Morris spent the second sleepless night of all his healthy years.

It was with a haggard face that he presented himself at his sister's breakfast table on the Monday morning. He tried to greet her with his usual affectionate gaiety, but Helena Atterbury was quick to notice the change in his appearance, though she made no sign. He had lived with her for years, this talented younger brother, and was the chief consideration and passion of her ambitious and worldly heart. Even her husband, Francis Atterbury, while tolerated with friendly courtesy for his wealth and position, had a far less important place in her affections.

She watched Donald now with concern as he absently crumbled his roll, though she spoke only of ordinary things.

"Madame Justice coming along all right, Don?" she asked, referring to a piece of allegorical statuary on which he was at work. "I'd like to run in to the studio this morning and pay my respects, if she's ready to receive callers."

Morris glanced up from the morning paper and was about to reply when an overwhelmingly correct maid entered and silently presented to his notice an unstamped letter lying on a silver tray.

"For me?" he questioned, unnecessarily, as he picked up the letter.

“Just came by messenger, sir,” replied the maid, in a still, small voice. “Is there an answer, sir?”

Donald Morris tore open the envelope while the maid waited. He pulled out the letter and glanced at the signature. Then, abruptly, he rose from his seat and strode quickly over to the window where, with back turned, he swiftly perused the letter, not once but twice, crushing it in his hand when he had finished.

With a quick gesture he turned to the maid.

“Where’s the boy who brought this?” he asked, almost fiercely. “In the hall? All right. You needn’t wait.” And turned sharply to leave the room.

“What is it, Don?” cried Helena Atterbury, rising quickly from the table. “Is anything the matter? Tell me——”

But her brother, entirely oblivious of the fact that she had spoken, was already in the hall.

She heard him questioning the messenger, heard the boy say, “Left at the office in the Pennsylvania Station yesterday, to be delivered this morning,” and saw the boy dismissed.

The trouble and concern in her brother’s face was more than she could bear.

“What is it, Don? What has happened?” she cried, coming up to him near the door.

He turned from the hall table, his hat already in his hand.

“I don’t know, Helena,” he said, confusedly. “I

can't make out—— And it was yesterday! Oh, God!" He clenched his hand. "Already too late! But I must see—I must make sure. Forgive me, Helena, but I can't wait. I must——"

He tore open the front door and rushed down the broad steps, looking in every direction for a cab.

Gramercy Park was peaceful and quiet on this spring morning. The sun shone on the budding trees and bushes of the little park, and already little children were playing and laughing with their nurses behind the iron railings. A few private cars stood waiting along the curb at different points, but not a cab was in sight.

Without wasting an instant, Morris passed swiftly westward. As he neared Fourth Avenue, he saw an empty cab rolling uptown. He hailed it with a shout and broke into a run.

"Ninety-nine Waverly Place," he called, as he pulled open the door and leapt inside.

"Make the best time you can," he called through the glass as the cab turned. "It'll be worth your while to forget the speed laws. Understand?"

The smart Bowery boy at the wheel grinned his comprehension of the order. His wary eye noted the appearance and probable generosity of his fare, and the pressure of his foot on the accelerator marked, with sincerity, the result of his observations.

"Fool, to hurry now," thought Donald, leaning forward, however, and chafing at every delay caused by the traffic of the busier streets. "Too late! I

know it will be too late. . . . But there's the merest chance. Thank God——" he broke off as they swung into University Place, and the way before them being comparatively clear, they sped swiftly southward.

In a few minutes the cab turned the corner of Waverly Place and stopped before the quiet brownstone front of Number Ninety-nine. It had once been a private residence of distinction, and even in its altered condition it had retained a look of reserved dignity which would have impressed any one less preoccupied than the man who now, dismissing the cabman with a handsome tip, sprang up its broad, worn steps.

In his haste, Donald Morris almost fell over a kneeling figure just inside the half-open door.

"Watcha da pail!" a voice protested, as its owner jumped to his feet and jerked a bucket of water out of the way. He grinned at Morris's rapid apology, disclosing two rows of strong teeth, shining white in a ruddy and rather stupid Italian face. "Me scrubba da floor," he explained the obvious. "White marb' maka lotta troub'."

Morris nodded, absently. "Miss Blake in? May I go up?" he asked, hurriedly. Already his foot was on the stair.

"Sure," answered the Italian, indifferently, bending again to his work. "Me tinka both in, awright."

The reply surprised and heartened Morris, to some slight extent allaying his fears. The man was evi-

dently the caretaker and might know. At any rate, he could see Mary's sister, Anne, and find out—— He swore to himself that he would find out—that he would spare no means and no person to get to the bottom of this—and with set jaw and racing feet he dashed up the stairs.

He passed two landings, where gas burned dimly beside discreetly closed doors, and in a moment reached the top of the last flight.

There was no light here save that which filtered through the old-fashioned coloured glass of the skylight above the stair well, but Morris did not hesitate, for there was only one door to Mary Blake's apartment, the same plain white door at which, yesterday, he had knocked so long and so fruitlessly.

His foot had scarcely touched the landing when his hand shot out and grasped the small brass knocker. The sharp "clap, clap," as it fell, resounded in the silence, and Donald waited.

No answer. Only grave silence within and the far-away roar of the busy city without.

He tried again, and yet again. Within, the silence lay unbroken.

"No living thing beyond this door could fail to hear," Morris muttered to himself. "No living—oh, God! What does her letter mean?"

He drew it from his pocket and looked at it, but the light was too dim. He could not decipher again its hurriedly written pages.

He leaned against the edge of the door and thought

as he had never thought before. The words of the letter came back to him like fire, and he clenched his teeth and groaned aloud.

“What shall I do? What can I do?” he whispered to himself in an agony of apprehension—and as he leaned forward to knock once more, his eyes, grown accustomed to the dimness, caught a glimmer of something white which lay upon the threshold of the door.

He dropped to his knees and touched it. He felt it to be a small portion—a corner of a scarf of soft, filmy silk, edged with fringe, fine as thistle-down. It lay across the sill, caught by the closed door. He pulled at it gently, but the door held it fast.

Swiftly his hand sought and found a paper of matches in his pocket. He lit one, and as the tiny flame leapt into being he held it down toward the bit of frail silk tissue.

Yes, he did recognize it. It was the scarf Mary had worn when last he had seen her. These soft folds of silk had floated against his cheek when—oh, God!—when he had kissed her.

Reverently he stooped to put it to his lips—and suddenly, with a cry, he sprang to his feet.

With the last flicker of the match he had seen something which brought his heart up, pounding in his ears.

Wildly he struck another match, and holding the end of the scarf in his left hand, he bent and brought

the wavering flame close to the place where the scarf was held by the door.

Upon its pure silken folds, spreading toward him from under the door, was an ugly dried blot of an ominous, dark red.

CHAPTER III

PETER CLANCY

MR. PETER CLANCY, early of the Metropolitan Police, late of the United States Secret Service, and currently the active head of a small but brilliant private detective agency, sat at his desk, yawning.

Except for a few bootlegging cases, the last few weeks had been singularly uneventful, and on this bright spring morning the equally bright red head of the young detective was full of visions of leafy woods and murmuring brooks, where trout rose audaciously and leaped, a flash of rainbow and silver, in the glancing sunlight.

“If nothing comes across to-day,” he ruminated, dreamily, “I’ll turn over this righteous old burg to O’Malley’s tender care, beat it out to Jersey, and have a hack at the trout with Harry Carlisle, darned if I won’t.”

The pleasant thoughts engendered by this determination were rudely interrupted by the sharp ringing of the telephone at his elbow.

“Another lot of hooch unearthed,” he muttered to himself disgustedly, as he took the receiver off the hook and held it to his ear.

“Hello,” he cried, with an unnecessary accent on the first syllable. “Who wants me, Maggie? Oh, all right. I don’t know him, but put him on.” An instant’s pause, then—“Hello, yes. Peter Clancy speaking. Yes?” a rising inflection on the last word.

Suddenly the expression of annoyance left his face. He listened intently. His eyes narrowed to slits of flashing blue, his relaxed body tautened in every fibre. Once or twice he shot a question into the transmitter, but the entire conversation over the wire could have been measured by seconds.

At the end—“Ninety-nine Waverly Place? I’m there!” he said, and flinging the receiver upon its hook, he dashed into the street, picked up a passing taxi, and made good his word.

The street door of Ninety-nine Waverly Place was ajar. Clancy, flinging it wide as he reached the threshold, was greeted by a fluent ejaculation in profane and picturesque brogue, winding up with—

“It’s the divil and all that’s in it at all, at all! Bangin’ me in the stomach with the whole side of a house!”

“Hello, Sullivan! What’re you doing here?” cried Clancy, catching the arm of the uniformed policeman with a gesture which was, in itself, a hasty apology. “Anything to do with——” A motion of his head indicated the upper part of the house.

The officer nodded, and through his suddenly assumed air of preternatural sagacity there appeared a deep perplexity.

“Are you on it, yourself?” he asked, though he anticipated the affirmative answer. “Mr. Morris called you up, I suppose,” he continued. “Said he was going to get the best man in New York, and I guess he has, at that,” with a complimentary grin. “Ye can’t down the Irish, eh, Mr. Clancy? Well, and what d’ye make of it?”

“Don’t know many of the facts yet,” Clancy replied, hastily. “Am just going after ’em. But what are you doing down here? Why aren’t——”

“He requested me very polite to lave him alone wid it,” answered the policeman, with so conscious an air of virtue that Clancy could almost see the denomination of the large bill which he felt sure was in Sullivan’s pocket. “It was nothin’ agin my duty to lave him,” Sullivan explained, elaborately, “since I know Mr. Morris be sight, him not knowin’ me and offerin’ his card, which I had no need of at all, me havin’ been usher at the Opera, before I got too big for them little uniforms they do be havin’, and knowin’ the Morris box like it was me own ward. And I had to see the Captain when he come, didn’t I, and give him a hint of it before he wint upstairs?”

“Sure. You’re all right, Sullivan,” said Clancy, slapping the broad blue shoulder. “Be a good scout, and give me a hint before I go up. But be quick about it, will you? I don’t want to keep Mr. Morris waiting. Where did he find you?”

“Just down the block a piece. I was goin’ on me way, when I heard someone runnin’ like hell behind

me. 'Officer,' says he, 'come wid me, quick!' and he grabs me by the arm and no more he says, wid me racin' beside him puffin' to kape up, till we come to this door. Open it was, and up the stairs we go together like the divil was chasin' us. When we got to the top, 'Look,' says he, pointin' down, and no more words at all, at all, which might have been he was lackin' his breath, same as me. And I looked, and I couldn't see nothin' but somethin' white and thin, like smoke, a'most, that was stickin' out from under the door. You've heard about that?"

Clancy assented with a quick nod.

"Yes. He told me. So that's how he got you? That's what I wanted to know. Find out the rest upstairs. Thanks. See you later," and Clancy went up the stairs, two steps at a time.

Though his ascent was rapid, his foot fell quietly on the thick carpet. Quiet, too, was his hand on the knob of the door. He had often found that a sudden, unexpected entrance was effective in more ways than one. This time, however, the effect failed utterly, for the door was locked.

Clancy, frowning slightly, raised and let fall the small brass knocker.

He heard someone moving inside the apartment, and almost immediately a voice near the door asked:

"Who's there?"

At Clancy's reply, the door opened wide.

"Mr. Clancy!" ejaculated Donald Morris, accepting Peter's card with a glance of verification. "I

didn't think you could possibly get here so soon. It was good of you——” He did not finish the sentence, but quickly motioned the detective inside and closed the door.

The narrow hall into which Clancy stepped was rather dark, the only light coming in from an open door at his right. Through this door Morris immediately led the way, into a large living room, Clancy following close at his heels.

As Morris stepped into the light, Clancy's quick eyes took in at a glance his strong features and haggard aspect. This was a man not easily alarmed, Clancy thought. It would take a good deal to upset his balance, and, in search of enlightenment, his glance travelled swiftly all about the room.

“Everything here just as you found it?” he asked, quickly.

Morris nodded. “All but this,” he said, in a heavy voice, motioning toward a table which stood near one of the windows.

Clancy swiftly advanced and looked down intently at that which lay upon it. He touched it with his finger.

“You found this scarf across the door-sill,” he said, meditatively. And leaning closer he went on, “Stained. . . . Yes. . . . Blood? . . . Looks like it. Could hardly be anything else. . . . Not much of it. . . . And you found no——”

“There's no one, dead or alive, in the apartment,”

Morris interrupted, hastily. He felt that he could not bear to hear the word which he saw forming itself on the detective's lips. "The officer went all through the place with me. It's empty, quite empty, though the janitor thought both Miss Blake and her sister were here. And," with a motion of his hand, "the place was as you see it."

Again Clancy looked carefully around the room. It was unusually large and spacious, occupying the entire front of the old house. Simple, good old furniture, well placed, gave it an air of comfort and elegance, though there was not an unnecessary thing in the room. The three large windows facing the south were covered by thin ecru curtains held in place by a small rod at top and bottom, letting in the light but obscuring the view of the ugly, tall buildings across the way.

Standing there, in that viewless room, Clancy had a swift sense of the isolation of so many thousands of lives in this dynamic and vital city. What could not happen in a secluded, quiet back-water like this? What lives and deaths, with the teeming city surrounding them on every side?

The thought crossed his mind in a flash and was gone. He was not concerned now with profitless generalities. He had been summoned here to find out what had happened, and exactly what had happened, in this present case.

There was not a great deal to go upon in this room; nothing especially out of the ordinary save the stained

scarf upon the table, and the fact that the several drawers of a desk on the far side of the room had apparently been ransacked, some of them being still open, their contents partly scattered on the floor. A small table at the end of a long couch which stood at right angles to the fireplace had been overturned, and on the floor beside it lay a shattered vase of blue hawthorne.

Apparently nothing else was out of place, and it was, perhaps, not unusual in this spring weather that there should be a quantity of ashes in the old-fashioned open grate. But ashes of any kind, perhaps from early association with the stories of the great Sherlock Holmes, always interested Peter Clancy.

He knelt to investigate and found that the ashes appeared to be those of burnt paper only. He stirred them carefully, but could not find a vestige of charred wood nor a single bit of paper which had escaped the action of the fire.

Morris followed him silently about the room, asking no questions. He had the air of one dazed by a crushing blow.

Satisfied, for the moment, by a more or less casual inspection, Clancy returned to what was to him the most significant object in the room.

“This scarf,” said he, looking at it closely. “I think you told me you found it outside in the hall?”

“Partly outside and partly in,” Morris made

answer at once. "It was caught fast by the door, but some of the—of the blood on it was outside."

"H—m—m, yes," said Clancy, slowly. "And it belongs to someone who lives here, you think?"

"It was Miss Mary Blake's," answered Morris, decidedly.

"You're sure?"

"Perfectly."

"How do you know?"

"I recognized it at once," answered Morris with conviction. "She wore it when—when I brought her home after the closing of the play."

"Saturday—that was Saturday night, and this is Monday," Peter Clancy ruminated. "And that was the last you saw of her?"

"The last I saw of her, yes. I spoke to her on the wire Sunday morning, rather early, about ten o'clock. And I—I received a letter from her this morning. That was why I came. I was alarmed, and——"

"You were alarmed, then, before you came here. It was not only finding the scarf——"

"No. Her letter was so—so strange and unaccountable." Morris hesitated and, to help him out, Peter said:

"But you did expect to find Miss Blake here when you came this morning?"

"I," Morris spoke slowly—"I can't say that I expected to find her. I only thought there might be a chance. But I certainly did expect to find her sister, Anne."

“Oh, there’s a sister,” said Clancy. “Well, perhaps she’ll turn up. Maybe she’s just gone away for the week-end, or you know it’s quite on the cards that she may have gone out this morning, even, and not come back yet. She might have been looking for something in that desk in a hurry and left it upset. And as to the scarf, and the blood stain on it (I admit, you see, that it probably is blood) it might well be accounted for by some simple accident——”

Morris shook his head, the troubled frown remaining fixed upon his forehead.

“No, no,” he exclaimed. “It’s impossible to dispose of the conditions here so easily. I’m sure you’ll agree with me when you see the rest of the apartment. Something has happened here—something sinister. I’m sure of it. I’m at a loss to understand it all,” he pressed his hand against his forehead as if the throbbing of his brain made his head ache, “but perhaps you can make a guess. Come and see.”

CHAPTER IV

A VIEWLESS ROOM

DONALD MORRIS turned quickly and opened a door immediately on the right of the one which led into the hall.

“You found this closed?” asked Clancy.

“Yes.”

“Then we’ll keep it that way,” said Peter, suiting the action to the word. “I can always think better with everything as it was when found. Now, let’s see——” He glanced about him.

They stood in what was evidently a bedroom, but here disorder reigned supreme. All the drawers of a tall old mahogany bureau stood open, the contents flung about on the floor. A dressing table, by the one large window, had been rifled. The drawers had been pulled completely out and emptied on its top. A mound of hairpins, fine lace collars, and other small accessories of the toilet showed what they had contained. The doors of two closets stood open, but the interior appeared undisturbed. A number of very handsome and elaborate gowns and evening wraps hung in one of them, carefully arranged on hangers and covered with muslin slips. A rack containing delicate evening slippers stood in order

on the floor. In the other closet were street clothes and shoes, all of fine quality and elegant pattern.

Morris watched Clancy's face.

"What do you think now?" he asked, after a moment.

Peter shook his head.

"On its face, it's a clear case of looting," he replied, slowly. "By the way, was the window shade up, as it is now, when you discovered all this?"

Morris's tone was a trifle apologetic. "No, I remember I pulled up the blind to let in the light as soon as I came in."

Clancy crossed to the window and pulled aside the thin curtains which, as in the living room, covered it from top to bottom. He looked out on a deep, narrow well, or shaft, at the far end of which could be seen an open space, and beyond the backs of the houses at the opposite end of the block. On his right was the blank wall of the tall building next door.

"No fire-escape here," he murmured, half to himself. "The thief, if it was a thief, didn't get in this way, anyhow." He looked once more about the room, photographing its every detail upon the sensitized plate of his analytical mind. "I guess that'll be about all here for the present, Mr. Morris. Is there anything more?"

"Only more of the same kind," Morris replied, as he led the way through an open door into the narrow hall, which ran through the apartment from the living room in the front to the kitchen in the rear.

“This is the dining room,” he crossed the threshold of the next room on the right, “and you can see the condition here. Practically nothing left in the side-board drawers. The kitchen,” he led the way again, “seems to be all right, except that the window is broken just over the catch. The janitor called my attention to it. He came up with the officer to let us in and was much excited by the discovery. He said he knew that the window was not broken on the previous day. The officer thought it proved how the thief got in——”

“H—m—m. Yes,” said Clancy, closely inspecting the window. “Fire-escape here. Yes. So Sullivan got it all doped out, right off the bat, did he? Clever boy, Sullivan, he sure is.”

Clancy lingered a few minutes more in the kitchen, though Donald Morris could not, at the time, understand the reason for the delay. The detective stood gazing for quite a while at an innocent little sliver of ice which lay in the kitchen sink, apparently oblivious of his surroundings. When he opened the pantry door, and also looked into the refrigerator, it flashed across Donald’s mind that he might be hungry and looking for something to eat, for this, in ordinary circumstances, would be the natural inference from his actions, but if that were the case, Clancy made no mention of it, and at last signified that he had finished with the kitchen.

There was only one other room in the apartment, a small one near the kitchen door, evidently intended

for a maid's room but not used for that purpose, for a long rod, with a number of coat hangers upon it, crossed one side and a large trunk stood against the wall. The trunk was locked and the coat hangers were empty. A small, plain white chiffonier stood in one corner. The drawers were partly open, disclosing a few gloves and other articles of woman's apparel, all plain, old, and worn.

Neither here nor in the bathroom, which came next, were there any signs of disturbance.

As they stepped again into the hall, they were aware of a loud knocking on the door at the far end.

"That's Sullivan and the captain of the precinct, probably," said Clancy. "I'll go," and passing Morris he went quickly down the hall and opened the door.

His surmise proved to be correct. Sullivan ushered in Captain Fitzgerald and introduced his friend, Clancy, with evident pride.

Clancy took charge of the situation and conducted the captain through the apartment. The inspection finished, they all returned to the living room, where Morris awaited them.

"This is just a simple case of robbery, Mr. Morris," said the bluff police captain, deferentially (for who had not heard of the son and heir of the great Morris estate?). "We'll do our best to get hold of the lad as pulled it, but we're kind of up against it, as you can easy see for yourself. Sullivan tells me that the apartment is rented by the two Miss Blakes and that

they're both away. So how can we tell what's been taken, if any? Maybe you, being a friend——”

“It happens that I have never been in the apartment before,” Morris interrupted, hastily, “though I know Miss Mary Blake very well.”

“And do you know where the two of them has gone then?” inquired the captain.

“No,” answered Morris, slowly. “No. I'm afraid I can't help you there, either.”

“Well, then, you see,” Captain Fitzgerald shrugged his broad shoulders, “we don't know what's missing and so we can't know where to look for it, and equally if we don't know what's taken we don't know what kind of a guy would have been taking it. I'd like to promise results, seeing it's yourself has called us in, but it'd be just foolishness to do it till the ladies get back. As soon as they do, you let us know, and we'll take up the case again, see? It's all we can do——”

“Sure it is, Captain,” agreed Peter, heartily. “Mr. Morris must see that in a plain case of burglary like this you can't do anything till the owners appear and make a complaint. He's perfectly satisfied and so am I. But you don't mind if we stick around here for a bit, do you? We've got some business to talk over and it's quiet here.” He paused, and the utter silence of the place smote his nerves. “Yes, it sure is quiet,” he thought within himself, “as quiet as death.” Then aloud—“We'll lock up when we go and leave everything as is. So long, Sullivan. Much obliged to you, Captain. Hope I see you

again," and with pleasant words of farewell he determinedly ushered Captain Fitzgerald and his satellite out into the hall.

He closed the door carefully behind them, making sure that the lock was sprung, and returned to Morris who waited in the living room.

"Well, that's that," said Peter with satisfaction, as he seated himself beside the window.

Donald Morris was pacing about the room, a heavy, puzzled frown upon his face. He stopped in front of the detective.

"Why did you get rid of the police in that abrupt fashion, Mr. Clancy?" he asked. "It seems to me that something ought to be done at once to track down this burglar, and we need all the help they can give us. I would do anything—pay anything—rather than to have Miss Blake suffer loss. With their help we might have found some clue—something to go upon. If it's a simple case of robbery, as they think——"

Clancy looked up gravely and slowly closed one eye.

"If it is a simple case of robbery," he repeated, "Captain Fitzgerald has done the only thing in his power. He's got nothing to go ahead on, if—it—is—simply—robbery." He said the last words so slowly and with so much meaning that Morris started eagerly forward, crying—

"Then you don't think——"

"It may have been robbery," Clancy interrupted,

with grave intent. "But—it wasn't a simple kind of robbery, that I'll swear to."

"You mean?"

"Mr. Morris, did you notice that kitchen window which was the obvious place for the thief to make his entrance, since the fire-escape led up to it?" asked Clancy, slowly. "Well," he paused, "the window was broken just at the catch, where it ought to have been, but," he shook an impressive forefinger, "the glass had fallen entirely on the outside of the window. There wasn't a trace of it inside the room."

CHAPTER V

CAMOUFLAGE?

GOOD God," cried Donald Morris, sitting down suddenly and striking his hand on the arm of Clancy's chair. "Then I was right at first! Something terrible has happened, something complicated and sinister! I had a feeling that it was so when I called you. I——"

Peter leaned slightly forward and caught Morris's arm in a steadying grip.

"Hold hard, Mr. Morris," he said. "The whole thing may be a mare's nest, only I'll say right now that it does look a bit queer to me. But we won't get anywhere near the solution if we don't start at the beginning. Now let's get down to brass tacks."

Clancy felt the muscles under his hand relax somewhat, so he released his hold of Morris's arm and leaned back in his chair.

"When you called me on the 'phone, you told me nothing except that you had found a scarf of Miss Blake's stained with blood and that Miss Blake had disappeared, and asked me to come here as fast as possible. I beat it down here and found that the apartment had, apparently, been looted and that neither of the two women who live here were to be

found. Though, for the matter of that, have you any definite reason to think that either or both of them may not be back at any moment?"

"I think—I believe I have reason to think that Miss Mary Blake intended to go away—or—oh, I don't know just what to think."

"But you did expect the sister to be here," insisted Peter.

"Yes," Morris nodded. "I think I did expect to find her sister, Anne. And, as you say, for all I know she may come in at any moment——"

Peter folded his arms and, gripping his chin in his hand, slowly shook his head.

"She won't be back. Not for some time, anyway," he said, deliberately. "I'm pretty sure of that. In fact, I feel positive that neither of the sisters will show up for some little time to come unless their plans change."

"Why do you think that?" asked Morris, with a quick, eager frown.

"The occupants of this apartment planned to leave it," said Peter, gravely. "They made their plans well in advance, and one of them, at least, was a good housekeeper."

"How in the world do you know that?" asked Morris, frankly puzzled.

"Perfectly obvious," answered Peter, with a slight shrug. "Didn't you notice the bedroom in there?" He jerked his thumb in the direction of the room adjoining.

“I—I don’t think I did, particularly,” Morris hesitated. “There was so much else——”

“I know. But if you’d happened to notice the bed, you’d have seen that it had nothing on it at all but one sheet, and that wasn’t put on in the usual way, but was all over it, even covering the pillows. No housekeeper would fix a bed that way if she were coming back to-night, or to-morrow, or any time soon, would she?”

“I haven’t much experience with that sort of thing,” said Morris, “but it doesn’t seem as if she would.”

“Then there was the kitchen,” Clancy went on. “There wasn’t a bit of perishable food anywhere around. The refrigerator was entirely empty and the doors left open, just as my mother used to do when we all went away anywhere for a visit. The ice had been taken out and put in the sink. There’s a very little piece of it there now, or was when we looked the place over. Do you draw any conclusion from that?”

“Only, as you say, that both the sisters must have intended to leave.”

“And you get nothing more from the little piece of ice that hasn’t melted yet?”

Morris shook his head.

“Why, don’t you see,” Peter explained, with a little gleam in his eye, “that just about fixes the time they left. Given the size of the ice chamber, which is small, and the fact that the ice couldn’t have been left on Sunday, don’t you see that, with a hot night

like last night, it would have melted entirely away if it had been put into the sink earlier than yesterday afternoon? The box wouldn't have held a piece big enough to last over if it had been put there in the morning. Somebody was in this apartment as late, I should say, as five o'clock yesterday afternoon."

"Then there *was* someone here when I came, just before lunch," exclaimed Morris, quite convinced by the other's rapid reasoning.

"It's more than probable," said Peter. "At least there was someone here at a much later hour. I'm sure of that. Now, who was it? They evidently had no maid in the house. There's no bed in the maid's room and only a single bed and a big couch in the bedroom. Both of the sisters must have slept in there. Now, were they both here yesterday afternoon? and did they leave together? And then did someone break in?" he mused. "That's, of course, what it looks like . . . and yet. . . . Why the glass on the outside of the kitchen window, if it was an outside job? And how do we know for certain that anything has been stolen? Is this robbery business camouflage?" He sat up suddenly and looked Donald Morris straight in the eye. "What do you think, yourself?"

"I don't know what to think, Mr. Clancy," answered Donald, pressing his hand to his forehead. "I really don't. You see so much more clearly than I. You are able to reason everything out. You know everything that I do——"

“Except—” said Peter, slowly and seriously—
“you’ll forgive my mentioning it if it has no possible bearing on the case, but it goes without saying that you’re more anxious about Miss Blake than you could possibly be if she and her sister had just gone off on a trip and their apartment had been entered when they weren’t here. You told me that you were alarmed about her—that was why you came here this morning. You mentioned a letter——”

“Yes,” said Donald, rising and moving restlessly about the room. “There was the letter—and this.” He paused beside the table on which still lay the filmy scarf. He shuddered as he looked at it. “I was almost beside myself when I found it. I thought that the blood on it had flowed out from—something inside the door. . . . And the janitor, not knowing me, refused to open the apartment. It wasn’t till I got the policeman. . . . Oh, God, it was awful! The suspense——” He strode abruptly to the window and did not turn until he had partially regained his composure.

“And then—there was the letter——” Clancy persisted. “You said, some time ago, that it was strange, unaccountable. . . .”

He waited a moment, watching Morris’s face. He could almost see the struggle which was going on in the mind of this clever, sophisticated man of the world, into whose world had been thrust an occurrence with which no previous experience had given him the ability to cope. Would he show the letter?

Could he take a man, as Clancy felt himself to be, from another sphere, into his entire confidence?

Donald's eyes searched the face before him and Clancy returned his gaze with a glance so frank and open, so intelligent and resourceful, that Morris was favourably impressed, even more so than he had been when his cousin, Dick Schuyler, hastily summoned on the wire, had enthusiastically recommended Peter Clancy as the only absolutely dependable detective in New York.

"Mr. Morris, why are you so sure that something has happened to Miss Blake?" asked Peter, putting an end to an almost imperceptible pause. "You do think something unpleasant has happened, don't you? Something pretty awful—else why have you called me in? And now that I am in, how can I help you if you won't give me a look at the hand you're holding?"

He smiled his winning, cheerful smile and spread out his hands. Morris straightened his shoulders and cleared his throat. The uncertainty was gone from his eyes.

"You're right, Mr. Clancy. Perfectly right," he said. "I'm sure there's something wrong, dreadfully wrong here, and I want your help. I will give you every assistance in my power and will be perfectly frank and open with you. What I am about to tell you is known to no one and I will ask you to treat it in confidence."

"You may be quite at ease in your mind about that," said Peter, promptly. "My job wouldn't

amount to a hill of beans if I couldn't keep my mouth shut and my eyes open. So let me have what you've got and, believe me," he added, seriously, "it goes to the bottom of the well, and I'll help you for all I'm worth and then some."

Clancy's manner was so straightforward and engaging that Donald impulsively held out his hand. Peter returned the strong clasp, and the two young men, so near in age, so far apart in experience of the world, became firm allies.

As their hands fell apart, Morris spoke—

"First of all, I must tell you," he said, with dignity, "that I have asked Miss Mary Blake to become my wife."

Peter drew in a sharp breath. He knew, as all the world knew, of Mary Blake's sudden leap from obscurity into world-wide fame; he had some knowledge, through friends in the theatrical profession, of how dark that obscurity had remained. And Donald Morris—the heir to the Morris millions! That he should—

"And Miss Blake has accepted." Clancy's words were in no sense a question, so sure was he that there could be no other conclusion.

Morris flushed slightly.

"She refused," he said, quietly, "but in such a way that I had hopes—I believed——" He paused, then went on, "That was late Saturday night. I have not seen her since. There is only her letter, and——"

"May I see the letter?" asked Peter, gravely. "I

think, perhaps, that it's a lot to ask, but, you see," he broke off, "there isn't so much to show here that there's anything to be alarmed at. It looks as if there had been a burglary—and there's that scarf. But there isn't an awful lot to get excited about, seems to me. If Miss Blake went off at the end of the season and took her sister with her——"

"That's another thing," interrupted Donald, hastily. "Did her sister go with her? Somehow—I can't just tell you why—I have a feeling that perhaps she didn't. Though I've never met Miss Anne, somewhere I've gotten the impression that—that they weren't exactly friendly. . . . Whether it was the way Mary spoke when I asked about her sister . . . or whether it was what she said in the letter."

"Let me see the letter, Mr. Morris," said Clancy, gravely. "Let me judge for myself."

CHAPTER VI

“MY SISTER, ANNE——”

SLOWLY, Donald Morris put his hand inside the breast of his coat and drew out several slightly crumpled sheets of paper. He spread them out and his eyes rested tenderly on these words—

MY BELOVED——

I write it for the first—and perhaps, who knows—the last time. But I have said it in my heart for so long—My beloved! I can say it to you now without shame—after last night.

His eyes travelled on down the succeeding pages to the end. When he had finished, he turned down the top of the first page.

“I will ask you not to read that.” He addressed Clancy with a quiet reserve which became him well. “It is significant only to me and, I think, can have no bearing on what has happened. I will be glad if you will read the rest.”

He handed the letter to Clancy who scrutinized it closely. It was evidently written in haste and under the stress of great excitement. He read—

I did not sleep. I have been thinking and thinking—how much to tell you—how to explain——

My sister Anne, with whom I live is——

(This last sentence was heavily crossed out, almost obliterated, but Peter was sure that these were the words.) The letter went on—

No, I will not tell you about Anne, about the bitterness and tragedy of my life. If it can be removed, if I escape, whole and clean, I will come to you. There is danger, I know, on account of—— No, I cannot tell you the danger without explaining all. But danger is nothing to me now. I will put fate to the test and have done.

What I do I must do quickly, before my courage fails. If I were to see you again—— That can not be. I could not see you face to face again and not tell you—and then——

No, I'm determined. I've let things go on too long. I saw it in your dear face when I left you. I am determined that you shall make no sacrifice for me.

If I fail, there will be no one left but Anne, and you will never find her. She will see to that. If I succeed, I will come back to you. I promise, my beloved, as solemnly as if I were on my death-bed. I will come back and tell you all that I have hidden so carefully, my ugly, pitiful secret, which is known to but one person, now, in all the world—and after that, you may do as you will with me.

If I never see you again, believe, oh, you must believe, that I love you. That, knowing you as I have come to know you, I will stake everything to come clean in your eyes, or I will never look into your dear eyes again. I am thinking of you, my dearest in all the world, only of you, and I beg, with my heart full of tears, that if I fail, you will remember gently her whom you have known as

MARY BLAKE.

Peter sat for a long time after he had finished reading, lost in thought. At last he stirred and, pointing to the signature, he said:

“Then Mary Blake is not her own name.”

Morris shook his head. “No, I know that to be her stage name only,” he said, quietly.

“And her real name is?”

“I don’t know.”

Peter thought, “And yet he has asked her to be his wife. She must be a wonder!” Aloud he said, referring to the letter:

“I think there is something here to account for your impression that Miss Blake wasn’t too keen on her sister Anne. At any rate, the sister seems to be connected in some way with the thing that was troubling her. Did you make out this blotted place? These words crossed out?”

He indicated with his finger. Donald bent above the crumpled sheet.

“Yes,” he said, “I made it out to be, ‘My sister Anne, with whom I live, is’——”

“That’s what I make it,” said Clancy. “And then she speaks again, right after it, of the bitterness and tragedy of her life, and it seems to be in connection with Anne. . . . And here again,” he turned the page, “she says there will be no one left but Anne, and that you will never find her. What does that mean? And who is the one person who knows her secret? Surely her sister, who lives with her, would be the most likely to——”

“And the danger,” Morris broke in. “She speaks of danger. Oh, God! And she isn’t here and I don’t know where she’s gone!” He clenched his hands upon the chair arms and looked at Peter in agonized entreaty.

“We’ll take steps to find her,” Peter said, firmly, encouragingly. “And we’ll start this instant. Come! We’ll get the janitor up here and see what he knows, since we’re on the spot. He must know something, at least, about their ordinary habits, whether a maid came in by the day, who some of their friends are, possibly. We might get a clue, a hint, from anywhere or anybody. You never can tell. We’ve got to trust a good deal to luck. But you know ‘the luck of the Irish!’” This with a cheerful grin as he went toward the door. “I’ll get the Dago first,” he said, and vanished.

CHAPTER VII

A SPLASH OF BLOOD

THE door closed after Peter with a snap of the spring lock, and Donald Morris waited, striding nervously about. At every turn in the length of the room he paused beside the frail scarf which still lay upon the table. It drew him with an irresistible, horrible fascination.

Whose blood was that upon it? What fearful scene had taken place in this quiet room? The overturned table suggested that there might have been a struggle. But what sort of a struggle, and between whom? Was there some secret animosity between these two sisters, living so closely together and in such seclusion? That had been his impression for a long time. Was it correct? And if so, what then? Had the feeling between them been serious enough to cause——

His troubled reflections were interrupted by a quick, quiet knock on the outer door. He went swiftly into the shadowy hall, and hearing the detective's voice just outside, he threw open the door, disclosing Clancy and the janitor.

The latter seemed very much abashed by the summons. He snatched off his old hat, and with his

two hands clasped behind his back he bowed several times in a quick, foreign way, and smiled deprecatingly.

He was dressed in an old loose pair of dark trousers and a blue-and-white striped, long-sleeved blouse, open at the throat. Altogether he appeared what he was—a kindly, childlike, dirty little Italian, such as one may see by the hundred in the section south of Washington Square.

“Come on in, Angelo,” said Clancy, pleasantly. “Don’t be afraid. Mr. Morris and I just want to ask you a few questions. Name’s Angelo Russo,” he added, turning to Morris. “Says he’s been janitor here for about four years.” Then, turning back, he took the seemingly reluctant Italian by the arm. “Come in here, Angelo,” he repeated. “Nothing for you to be afraid of. I guess Sullivan must have treated you kind of rough, didn’t he? But he didn’t mean anything. Professional etiquette, that’s all. Now sit down there and make yourself comfortable, and tell us what you know about the tenants here.”

His manner was cheerful and disarming, and the janitor was reassured. He seated himself on the edge of a chair near the door of the living room and answered Peter’s questions with a volubility which was almost overwhelming.

“No know mucha ’bout da ladies,” he said, with a characteristic shrug and a nervous grin. “Ver’ quiet, ver’ nice. Both keep alla to selves. Both

speak pleasant to Angelo, no speak mucha. Say 'Nice day, Angelo,' Mees Anne say, ev' morn' she go out buy grub. Dat all. 'Nice day, Angelo.' Da tall, gran' one, Mees Mary, she say, 'Good eve', Angelo,' if see her when she go teatro at night. No see her ver' mucha. No roun' vestabula, me, lika in morn' when Mees Anne come down. Den——"

"What does Miss Anne look like, Angelo?" Donald Morris interrupted. He was filled with an intense desire to learn all that was possible about the strange sister whom he had never seen—whom, now, it appeared he would never see if Mary's letter gave the exact fact. "There will be no one left but Anne, and you will never see her. She will see to that." Why would there be no one left but Anne? Where——

"She looka da nice, quiet lady," again the Italian shrug and the gesture of open hands. "Weara da black, ver' plain. No tall an' gran' lika da sist'. She looka lika alla da ladies, only she hava da big, reda mark on face, here, looka lika blood——"

"You mean a birthmark?" Clancy broke in hastily. "A conspicuous birthmark?" He exchanged a hopeful glance with Morris. A thing of that sort ought to make it easier to trace her, if it became necessary.

"Non capisch da birt'mark," Angelo showed a slightly puzzled face, "but he big reda place alla lika here." He raised a stubby brown hand and passed it across his dark cheek and down on his

neck. "Too mucha bad," he added. "Oth' side she awright."

"Did she resemble Miss Mary?" asked Morris, eagerly. "Did she look at all like her sister?"

"N', no!" The Italian's negation was very emphatic. "Mees Mary tall, lika Madonn', stan' straight," he lifted his square body in the chair, "lika da lil'. See face tru vail lika ange' in cloud, *si, si*. Sometime me lika see no vail. N', no. Ev' time she wear him. Tinka, me, she wear him so peopl' in street not know she great Mees Blake ev'bod' talk 'bout."

Morris nodded. "That's true, Angelo. But tell us more about Miss Anne. We know how Miss Mary looked." There was a world of sadness in his voice. "Describe Miss Anne to us. Was she tall or short?"

"*Si, si*. Pret' gooda tall," answered the janitor, considering heavily, "but no so ver'. She hanga down, lika dis," drooping slightly forward. "She looka ver' sad alla time. She nev' speak, only, 'Gooda morn', Angelo.' That all. Jus' 'Gooda morn', Angelo'."

"How long were the sisters here?" asked Clancy.

"Not know for sure. Come two, tree year ago. Soon aft' me taka da job."

"So long as that, and you don't know anything more about them?" asked Peter, sharply.

Again the shrug, with eyebrows raised. "How me know mucha 'bout da ladies? Justa da janitor, me."

“Well, you must know,” said Peter, “what servants they had.”

“No serv’, no serv’ ’tall,” Angelo replied, quickly. “Two ladies all alone. Tinka dey do alla own work. Tinka, me, Mees Anne do alla work, an’ Mees Mary, she sleep late. No see come down till time for she go teatro. Mees Anne she go out ev’ morn’——”

“All right,” Peter interrupted. “Then they had no servants—not even a laundress?”

“Me no know—maybe. Somebod’ might come for wash. Me no know who, if anybod’. Me no in hall alla time. Only morn’ when clean up hall—me liva da basemen’. Door no lock alla da day. If somebod’ ringa da bell, me go.”

“Then you don’t know if the ladies had many visitors, or who they were?” asked Peter, with a frown. The conversation seemed not to be eliciting anything useful to his purpose.

The janitor shook his head.

“See ol’ lady come, two, tree, four time. Fine, gran’ ol’ lady, ver’ big, wide——” Angelo thrust out his hands together, palms down, to the full reach of his short arms, and brought them around to his sides in a full, sweeping curve, graphically expressive of great *embonpoint*. “Gran’ ol’ lady,” he repeated, his white teeth flashing in a grin, “she puffa some on alla da stair!”

“You don’t know her name?” Peter inquired, eagerly.

Again the Italian shook his head.

“Or where she lives?”

“How know, me?” was the reasonable response.

“And you’ve never seen any other friends of theirs?”

“No, no. No see anybod’.”

Peter realized that there was no hope in this direction. He leaned back and thought for a moment, frowning, his keen eyes half closed. Morris shifted, uneasily, in his chair. He felt that they were merely wasting time. He had no ideas as to what should be done in the circumstances, but he felt, agonizingly, that they should be doing something—anything. At last Clancy spoke:

“It was easy enough for both the sisters to leave without your seeing them, then, Angelo?”

“Oh, *si, si*. Easy—sure!”

“And they said nothing to you about going? That seems a little queer to me. Did they ever go away before, and leave the apartment empty, and not tell you to look out for things?”

“No tinka dey both go sama time before. Mees Mary, she go in summer time, but Mees Anne stay alla time home.”

Peter looked around the room. Had they gone away together this time, amicably, as sisters should? The strange phrasing of the letter came back to him, and his eyes rested, in disturbed consideration, on the blood-stained scarf.

Suddenly he rose from his chair. “I guess that’s about all, Angelo,” he said. “I don’t suppose you’re

familiar enough with things here," he glanced again about the disordered room, "to know what's missing."

"No, no." The janitor jumped to his feet, shaking his head rapidly, emphatically. "Mos' nev' come up here, me. No know what gone. Sleepa in basemen'. My wife she sick—she hear noding, me hear noding! Burg' he mus'a go up fi'-'scape into da kitch', you see? Wind' broke——"

"Yes, I saw that the window was broken," said Peter, quietly. "Well, we're much obliged to you, Angelo. I guess we won't need you any more, but I may see you again. I may be coming in here a few times. It'll be all right. You can ask Sullivan. He knows me and Mr. Morris, too."

At the words of dismissal the Italian, nothing loath, started for the door. Peter followed him into the hall.

"You keep your eyes open, Angelo," he said, "and let us know if any one comes to this apartment. We'll make it worth your while. And, by the way, who has the apartment just below this?"

The janitor's left hand was on the knob of the door. "Nobod'. He's empty. Been empty two, tree mont'."

"All right, Angelo," said Peter, smiling genially. "Don't forget what I said about letting us know if any one, *any one*, mind, comes to this apartment or asks for Miss Blake or her sister. Find out who it is if you possibly can. It'll be worth more than this to

you, by a dampsight," and he thrust a folded bill into the janitor's welcoming palm.

The Italian's sharp little eyes glanced up and away. "Me tella you somebod' come," he agreed, readily.

"Oh, and before you go," said Peter, in an off-hand manner, "just leave me the door key, will you?"

"Door he shutta da spring lock," explained Angelo, quickly. "No needa da key."

"No?" said Peter, casually. "Well, I'd rather have the key, anyway. Always feel safer, somehow. I'm so absent-minded, Angelo, that I often forget things and have to go back for 'em, and if the door was shut, I'd have to go all the way to the basement to hunt you up, see? Just give me the key and I'll leave it with you when I go down."

"Awright, awright," said the Italian, pulling a key from a ring which was secured by a chain to his belt. "Me tinka awright," and he opened the outer door.

As he did so, the sun, nearing the zenith, shone in from the front room, striking full upon the white panels, and Peter, who was just behind him, uttered a sharp exclamation and started forward. Instinctively, he caught the Italian's arm and drew him away from the door.

"Just a moment. Mr. Morris!" he called in a voice the excitement of which was carefully held in check. "Come here just a moment, will you?"

“Look here.” He spoke again as Donald Morris quickly reached his side. “Look at this!”

Angelo Russo caught his breath, and crossed himself, fervently. “Madre di Dio!” he whispered to himself.

Morris, leaning forward, felt a horrible shiver pass over him from head to foot.

On the white door, just below the lock, was a long, dark splash of blood.

CHAPTER VIII

THE VOICE OVER THE WIRE

I DON'T know how it escaped me before, except that the hall was so dark," muttered Peter, angrily, to himself, as he closed the door upon the Italian's hurried departure.

Hastily he took a small but powerful electric hand-light from his pocket and flashed it slowly all about. The door showed no further traces, inside or out, but on the floor, which was stained dark brown and heavily waxed, there were two or three dull, round spots. Peter tested them with moistened forefinger, and held up his hand to Morris. The end of the finger was stained red.

Swiftly he proceeded down the hall, flashing his torch back and forth close to the floor. As he came opposite the door of the room which had been used as a storeroom or closet, Morris who, white to the lips, had followed closely, heard him give a little grunt of satisfaction and saw him drop to his knees.

"Plenty of it here," said Clancy, pointing, and he flashed the light so as to bring out a large, dull blot upon the softly shining wax of the floor. "And here! and here!" he added, indicating smaller spots just

beyond on the floor and one, showing dark red, on the white baseboard.

A moment later he rose. Rapidly and thoroughly he inspected the entire apartment, flashing his hand-torch into all the dark corners. Morris, silent and apprehensive, followed him, closely watching every movement. They found nothing more, and returning to the living room, Peter stood for several moments before the window, lost in thought. At last he turned to Donald Morris and said:

“I won’t try to put anything over on you, Mr. Morris. The detective who’s able to dope out everything in a complicated case by looking at a little bunch of ashes doesn’t exist. You can take it from me,” with a wry smile, “there ain’t no such animal. . . . Frankly, I’m at a loss. How serious this thing is, it’s impossible for me to say. But it looks like a pretty ugly combination of circumstances, I’ll go that far. . . . If you want to go on with the proposition—and I take it for granted that you do——”

“I do, I must!” There was no uncertainty in Donald’s tone.

“Well, then, our best bet is to get busy tracing Miss Blake and her sister. We’re only wasting time. Apparently there’s nobody here who knows anything about where they might have gone, who their friends are, or——”

Both men started violently. In the stillness of the room a telephone bell rang out, loudly, insistently.

Peter faced swiftly about to the instrument which stood on a small stand to the left of the door into the hall. With a leap he reached it, caught the receiver off the hook, and held it to his ear.

"9282 Sturdevant?" a voice intoned over the wire.

Peter glanced at the little plate over the mouth-piece and replied at once:

"9282 Sturdevant. Who's calling?"

"Just a moment," came the honeyed reply. "Here's your party."

"Somebody calling this apartment, all right." Holding his hand over the transmitter, Peter spoke to Donald Morris, whose face was a study in anxiety and excitement.

There was an instant's silence; then along the wires came another voice, clear and resonant, deep and full, though whether that of a man or woman Peter could not be sure.

"Anne," it said. "Anne! Are you there?"

Morris was surprised at Clancy's answering tone. It was low and gentle, not at all like his usual voice.

"Who's calling?" Clancy repeated, softly.

"Why, Anne! You know. You——" Evidently Peter's attempt at dissimulation was not entirely successful, for the voice went on, sharply—"What number is this?" and waited, necessitating a reply.

"This is 9282 Sturdevant. Whom are you calling?"

"I'm calling Miss Anne Blake," was the quick response. "Is she there, and who are you?"

“Miss Anne isn’t here now,” said Peter, smoothly. “Can I take a message?”

He thought there was a note of alarm in the reply—“No. No. I want to find Anne Blake. I want to speak to her at once.”

“Would Miss Mary do?” asked Peter.

He was sure that there was a quickly restrained gasp at the other end of the wire. Then the voice said, peremptorily:

“I want to know who this is speaking from Miss Blake’s apartment.”

“Who is it wishes to know?” Peter countered.

There was a pause. Peter waited. . . . The pause lengthened and Peter again spoke into the transmitter—

“Hello, hello!”

No answer.

Peter waited a moment and then moved the receiver up and down on the hook without effect. At last—

“Operator,” came in a dulcet voice over the wire.

“Connect me with that party again,” cried Peter, urgently. “You’ve cut us off.”

“What number was it, please?”

“I don’t know,” fiercely. “See if you can trace it. And hurry!” and Peter waited, holding the receiver to his ear.

“Who was it?” cried Morris, unable to restrain his anxiety.

“I don’t know, dammit!” said Peter, vehemently.

“I’m afraid I’ve made a fool of myself. Somebody calling Miss Anne Blake, and they shied off when they found she wasn’t here. I wish to God I knew who it was. Anybody that knows her well enough to call her ‘Anne’. . . . It must have been a friend who might know something that would help! And they cut off, I’m sure. Purposely. Oh——”

“Here’s your party,” said the operator in his ear.

“Maybe it’s all right,” said Clancy, hopefully, to Morris. “They’ve got the connection again. Hello! Who is this?”

“Vanderbilt Hotel,” came the prompt answer.

“Will you please find out for me who just called Sturdevant 9282, and get them on the wire again?”

Peter repeated the name of the hotel to Donald Morris and both men waited anxiously. It seemed an age before the information came back—

“Party spoke from a public booth. We don’t know who it was. Sorry.”

Peter hung up the receiver with an angry click and turned to Morris, repeating the answer he had just received.

“It’s a damn shame,” he went on. “I’d give a good deal to know who it is that’s worried about Anne Blake just now. The man or woman, whichever it was, that just called was pretty well fussed up and afraid of making a break. And now it’s all off! . . . Well—it leaves us about where we were before we were so rudely interrupted. There’s nothing

to do but to start tracing Miss Blake and her sister from here—and the sooner we begin, the quicker we'll find them."

"But where can we start? We know nothing of their movements," said Donald, in a tone of deep discouragement.

"Pardon me," said Clancy. "We do know something, though I admit it's not much. We may infer, I think, that there was someone in this apartment, probably as late as five o'clock yesterday. . . . That was Sunday . . . and if there was any luggage, which almost undoubtedly there was, it means a cab, since it would have been impossible to get an expressman. . . . Miss Blake didn't have a car of her own by any chance?" he asked, on sudden thought.

"No," replied Morris, eagerly, his anxiety slightly mitigated by the prospect of immediate action. "But I happen to know that she habitually used a taxi from a garage over near Sixth Avenue. She spoke once about how reliable they were. Let me see. . . . The name was . . . Horton—no—Holden? . . . No, I can't be sure. But I know the place. We passed it coming from the theatre and she pointed it out to me." He rose, excitedly. "Come on. I'll show you where it is," and he caught Peter's arm in a nervous grip.

"That's good news," cried Peter, enthusiastically. "Now we'll begin. But there's something I must do before we go. I may want to come in here without

disturbing our friend, Angelo. It won't take a minute."

He drew a small piece of wax from his pocket and began working it up in his fingers, while Morris watched him, his impatience somewhat tempered by curiosity.

"Carry a lot of odd things about with me," Clancy explained. "Need almost as many as a first-class burglar. You see," he went on, as with practised fingers he took an impression, in the wax, of the key Angelo had left with him. "You never can tell when a thing'll come in handy. I may need it and then, of course, I may not. But it's just as well to be prepared." He put the model carefully away in a small case and returned the case to his pocket. "Now I'm ready," he added, briskly, catching up his hat from a table just inside the door of the living room. And without further words the two men hastily closed the door, made sure that it was fast, and descended the stairs at a run.

Peter called to Angelo from the top of the basement stairs, delivered the key, and joining Morris, who waited impatiently at the door, they passed out into the busy streets.

The noise of traffic increased as they neared Sixth Avenue, and Peter Clancy, whose susceptibilities and intuitions were preternaturally keen, contrasted the busy roar and rattle and movement of many people with the silence and aloofness of the still place they had just left. Somehow, he had the cer-

tain intuition that those quiet walls had sheltered a tragic situation, unexplained and, perhaps, unexplainable. The mere fact that he had so little to go upon piqued his vivid curiosity and brought up every reserve of his fighting Irish instincts. He swore to himself that he would solve this enigma, that he would find out every detail of this strange situation, if it took "till Kingdom Come."

His feeling was greatly enhanced by the personality of the man who was hurrying by his side. No one who had ever been admitted, in any degree, to Donald Morris's confidence had failed to feel his remarkable charm. Peter had seen him in an hour of great stress, when every mere conventionality had been swept away, and a very real personal desire to be of service was the result of this glimpse of the actual man.

These thoughts passed rapidly through the mind of the young detective as they hurried along the streets. They had not far to go, as the garage in question was east of Sixth Avenue, in one of the cross streets, just above Washington Square. Morris led the way unhesitatingly.

"There it is," he said as they turned the corner. "Hammond's Garage. I knew it began with an H. Miss Blake has used this garage exclusively for some time. They'll be sure to know——"

"Let's go a bit easy," said Clancy, with his hand on Donald's arm. "We don't want to get up more excitement than is absolutely necessary. Suppose you leave it to me."

Morris nodded a ready acquiescence, and promptly abandoning his place as leader, followed Peter into the little office, beside the big door of the garage.

“Good morning,” said Peter, pleasantly, to a heavily built man, who turned his swivel chair away from his desk at their approach and regarded them with the calm of a man whose business came to him without strenuous effort. “Is this Mr. Hammond?” Peter continued.

“It is,” said the man, shifting a large, unlighted cigar to the opposite corner of his mouth.

“My name’s Clancy,” Peter went on. “I just dropped in on an errand for Miss Blake—Ninety-nine Waverly Place, you know.” He wished to make sure that this was the right garage and waited for the affirmative nod which immediately followed. “Miss Blake wants to know,” he continued, smoothly, “why you didn’t send the taxi for her yesterday at five.”

Mr. Hammond’s composure was slightly shaken. He frowned and ponderously swung about to the desk. He opened a large book which lay upon it and ran his finger down the entries of a page dated May twenty-eighth. Frowning still more, he shook his head and called loudly—

“Joe!”

Immediately an overalled mechanic, with a long smear of black grease on his nose, appeared at the door.

“Yep.”

“Did you get a call for Ninety-nine Waverly any time yesterday afternoon?”

“I did not.”

“You’re sure?”

“I am that.” There was no hesitation, no uncertainty in the tone.

Donald Morris looked quickly at Clancy, but Clancy was entirely occupied with the two garage men.

“Well, that’s funny,” said Peter, with a puzzled frown. “Miss Blake was very much annoyed when your taxi didn’t come, and she had to get one from—where was it now? She told me, but I can’t remember. What’s the name of another public garage near here?”

“I don’t think there is any decent one anywhere near here except mine, but there’s a cab stand at the Lafayette. Maybe she got it from there. It would be the nearest place. Anyhow, Mr.—Mr. Clancy, you can bet we didn’t get the call, or we’d ’a’ been on the job. We’ve been drivin’ Miss Blake for a couple of years or more and we’re always very particular, anyway. Let’s see——” Hammond again referred to his book. “We took Ninety-nine Waverly to the theatre Saturday evening at seven forty-five, but we didn’t have a call to get her after the performance that night. . . . No. The last is May twenty-seventh at seven forty-five. Nothing after that.” He glanced at the mechanic who was waiting at the door. “All right, Joe,” with a nod of dismissal, and the man disappeared.

“I can’t explain it,” Hammond turned to Peter, “only we didn’t get the call, and I wisht you’d tell Miss Blake so. Joe’s been here for a long time and he’s very careful. Never knew him to make a mistake. Them darned telephone operators might have given her the wrong number and somebody thought they’d play a joke by sayin’ they’d come for her. I can’t think how else——”

“Well, it’s a mistake, then,” said Peter, pleasantly, “and I’ll tell Miss Blake—when I see her. Sorry to have troubled you,” and with an apologetic wave of the hand, he took Donald Morris by the arm and led him, disappointed and perplexed, into the street.

“Cheer up,” said Peter, as he turned him eastward. “Don’t get discouraged. We’ve only just begun. This may be a long chase and, as I said, we’ll have to trust a good deal to luck. I’m not disappointed a whole lot, as I had a kind of a hunch that the cab might not have come from a place where Miss Blake was well known. We’ll try the Lafayette, since it’s so near, and if we don’t find anything there, I’ll get my partner, O’Malley, on the ’phone and we’ll comb the city for that cab.”

“Like looking for a needle in a haystack,” muttered Morris, wearily.

“Oh, not so bad as that,” said Peter. “We’ve got that sort of thing pretty well systematized. It may take a little time, but we’re bound to find a cab, unless they left on foot, with only hand luggage, and that’s hardly probable, is it?”

“No, it doesn’t seem probable,” Morris said, after a pause. “And they couldn’t get an expressman on Sunday, of course. . . . Miss Blake expected to spend the summer in town . . . and she was here Saturday night, late. . . . She wouldn’t have sent her trunks beforehand. . . . It was a sudden resolution. . . .”

They were making their way eastward at a rapid rate, and in a few minutes they reached University Place and the pleasant old Lafayette. . . . He and Mary had dined there several times, Morris remembered with an inward groan, in some secluded corner where the lights were dim. Always she had avoided attracting attention, never seeking the public eye, except upon the stage. Unlike most actresses, she had even been averse to being photographed. He could remember only a few portraits which had been taken at the beginning of her career. Her face would be familiar to those who had seen her on the stage, but to few others. The thought troubled him now, since it would add to the difficulty of tracing her.

Clancy had left him upon the sidewalk at the entrance of the hotel. Running up the steps, the detective had exchanged a few words with the doorman. After that he had spoken to several of the taxi drivers lined up along the curb. Suddenly he turned, and beckoning excitedly to Morris, took a few rapid steps in his direction.

“The luck of the Irish!” Peter exclaimed, joy-

fully, as the two young men met. "You can't beat it! I've found the man."

"No!" cried Morris, eagerly.

"Yes!" said Peter with emphasis. "The next to the last man on the line, the one I just spoke to, took a lady and a trunk from Ninety-nine Waverly Place a little after five yesterday afternoon. Come on, and we'll get the rest!"

CHAPTER IX

WHAT THE CABMAN KNEW

“ONE lady?” questioned Morris, excitedly, catching Peter by the arm as they hurried toward the taxi, the driver of which stood, expectant, by its open door.

“Only one,” said Peter, in a low voice, “and I don’t know yet which one, but we’ll soon find out.”

He motioned Morris to get into the cab, and spoke familiarly to the chauffeur: “Drive us over to the Square, old top, and line up along somewhere where it’s quiet. We want to have a little talk with you. And you can keep your metre ticking, so that’ll be O. K.,” he added, with a grin.

The driver, a big, strong young fellow, grinned pleasantly in response and jumped to his wheel. In a moment they drew up in a quiet spot on the old Square.

“This do?” asked the taxi man, turning in his place and speaking through the open front of the cab.

“Fine,” answered Peter, who was seated directly behind him. He leaned forward and spoke in a friendly, confidential manner. “We want to find out something about the lady you took from over there,” he pointed in the direction of Waverly Place,

“yesterday afternoon. She went away without leaving any address, and something has happened which makes it necessary for her friends to locate her at once, see?”

The driver nodded his comprehension.

“I want to be sure it’s the lady we’re looking for. It’s an apartment house, you know,” Peter explained, rapidly, “so perhaps you’ll describe her to us.”

“Well,” said the driver, hesitatingly, “I don’t know as I can tell you so much what she looked like. She was dressed plain, in something dark, though blue or black or what, I couldn’t be so sure. She come hurrying along around the corner, but I was part way down the line, so I wasn’t much interested, though she did seem to be lookin’ for a taxi. She sorta gave the once-over to the two guys that was ahead of me, and then she stepped right up, quick, to my cab, and she says, lookin’ at me sharp through her veil, ‘Could you carry a heavy trunk down three flights of stairs by yourself?’ she says. It was kinda unexpected, ’cause they usually gets you to the place and then springs it. ‘I’ll make it worth your while if you can manage it alone,’ she says, flashing a five at me. ‘It’s this, over and above the fare,’ she says, kinda nervous and excited like. ‘You’re on, lady,’ I says. ‘Lead me to that trunk!’ I says, just like that. So she told me Ninety-nine Waverly Place, and I took her there and carried down the trunk, and, be gobs, it was heavy enough, and maybe worth the money at that.”

Morris was listening eagerly to every word. He could keep silence no longer.

“But the lady!” he said, excitedly. “Tell us more about her. Was she very tall and slender and beautiful?”

Clancy touched his arm. He was afraid that the chauffeur, if given a clear description, would think he had seen what Morris so evidently wished him to have seen.

“You describe her in your own way, Bill,” he interposed, addressing the driver, “but tell us everything you noticed about her. How about it, was she tall?”

“How’d you know my name was Bill?” asked the driver, irrelevantly, with a grin, and without waiting for a reply, he went on, “I don’t think the lady was so very tall; at least not so you’d notice it particular, but she was sorta thin, and she kinda stooped a little. She had on a thick veil, so I didn’t see her face hardly any when she come up to me on the street—only her eyes, and they was big and kinda—burning.” He hesitated a little. Evidently his powers of description were not often put to the test.

“Well,” said Peter, as the man paused, “you went up to the apartment with her to get the trunk. I think you said you carried it down three flights of stairs. That would have made it the floor next to the top one, wouldn’t it?”

“No,” said the cab driver, shaking his head, “it

was the top floor, and thankful I was there wasn't any more of 'em."

"Did you see any one else in the apartment?" asked Peter, carefully restraining his impatience.

"Not a soul," answered the man, "and I don't think there was anybody else there. It was awful quiet. I didn't see anybody and I didn't hear anybody moving around."

"Did you notice anything unusual about the apartment?" asked Peter. "Was it—what you'd call—tidy—when you were there?"

"I don't know," said Bill, scratching his head. "I ain't much of a hand at noticing things, I'm afraid. Places is apt to be a bit upset when people are going away. I didn't think anything about that. I only just went into the back room to get the trunk—and——" A sudden thought seemed to strike him—"now I come to think of it, I did get just a little peek at the lady's face as I was coming along the hall with the trunk on me back. She'd watched me strap it up, and then she went ahead of me into a room off the hall, toward the front. When I come along, she was standing over by the window, and there was a looking glass on the wall right in front of her. She'd just held up her veil to look for something on the little table there was there, and I saw her in the glass, just for a second, before she pulled the veil down again." He paused, and added, doubtfully, "Did the lady you was lookin' for have a kind of a scar or something on her face, on

—let's see—on this side?" He touched his right cheek.

Morris suppressed an exclamation, and Peter leaned still farther forward.

"What kind of a scar, Bill?" he asked, quietly.

"I don't know, exactly," answered the driver, hesitatingly. "The window was on the other side and I couldn't see so very plain, but it seemed to me there was some kind of a dark red mark on her cheek and down on her neck. I can't be sure, but I thought there was. I only saw it for a second. Does that help you any?"

"H'm'm——" said Peter. "Maybe. Maybe it will, Bill. . . . And you're pretty sure there wasn't any one else in the apartment?"

"Well," said Bill, "I'll leave it to you. I didn't see nobody and I didn't hear nobody, and when I took the trunk out, she was out on the stairs already, and she asked me to make sure the door was locked. And why would she be nervous about that, I asks you, if there was someone inside?"

"Doesn't seem reasonable, does it?" said Peter, thoughtfully. "But I don't quite see—— You say the lady was in the bedroom when you passed the door, but she was outside, on the stairs, when you took the trunk out. How was that?"

"Why, I hadn't got the trunk just right on me shoulders, and I stopped a second to shift it over. By the time I'd got it good, she'd come into the hall from the front end, and she didn't waste no time

getting the door open for me. She seemed in an awful hurry and excited like. She went on down the stairs a few steps to be out of the way of me'n the trunk, and then she stopped on a sudden, and says, 'Oh, I didn't think! You can't shut the door, can you?' And me bein' proud of me strength, says, 'Sure I can,' and I backs around sidewise and starts to shut the door, and darned if there wasn't a long trail of some kind of a lady's white silk dingbat caught onto the bottom of the trunk and been draggin' after me all the way down the hall, like a cat's tail."

Peter, hearing Morris draw in a sharp breath, cast a warning glance in his direction. The cabman, unobserving, went on—

"I thought I was going to have to get the lady back to pull it off and shut the door, but I give it a back kick and it landed free, and I shut the door by my own self. The lady was standin' part way down the stairs, awful impatient to be off (I guess, maybe, she was late for her train), and she looks back and says, 'Try the door, if you will, please, and see that it's fast.' So I did, and I guess that's about all, except that I took her and the trunk to the Penn. Station, and that's the last I seen of her."

"The Penn. Station. Good-night!" muttered Peter, disgustedly. "You can go anywhere in the country, almost, from the Penn. Station." Then, after an instant's thought, he said aloud: "That was funny, what you said about the white silk thing following you along the hall like a cat's tail,

Bill. Where do you suppose you picked the thing up?"

"Must have come from the storeroom where the trunk was," said Bill, readily. "Otherwise I'd 'a' seen it before I got to the door, if it'd been layin' on the floor of the hall, I mean. Must have been behind the trunk, too, down in the corner, where it was dark."

"Are you sure it fell entirely inside the door when you kicked it loose?" asked Peter. "Try to remember, Bill. I have a particular reason for wanting to know."

The man looked at him curiously, but replied at once—

"Why, it must have, I should think, but I can't be exactly sure. To tell you the truth," with a note of apology, "I didn't care so much where it went, s'long as it didn't trail along and make me ridiculous, and I didn't look so very careful. The trunk was bearin' down on me shoulders, and the lady was in a hurry."

"Yes," said Peter, absently, thoughtfully, and added, "How far down the stairs was the lady when you shut the door, Bill? Two or three steps, or more? Was she far enough up, I mean, to see the scarf drop?"

"No, she wasn't. I'm sure." This time the driver answered with certainty: "She was half way down the first flight anyway, and me just able to see her head over the rail."

"H'm—yes," said Peter, slowly. "Yes."

He considered for a moment in silence. Then he turned to Morris.

"Anything more you can think of that Bill might be able to tell us, Mr. Morris?" he asked.

Morris shook his head, despondingly.

"All right then, Bill," said Clancy. "You've given us quite a lot to think about, anyway, and we're much obliged to you. Just give me your name and address, will you, in case anything should turn up that we needed you again," and having entered the direction in his notebook, he added, "Now beat it over to the Penn. Station and show us where you left the lady."

"And this is for yourself," said Donald, leaning quickly forward and slipping a bill into the man's hand.

The crisp slip of green-engraved paper must have been more effective than the most advertised pure gasoline and motor oil, for no cab of its size and condition had ever made better time than Bill's cab did in getting to its destination. It was only a matter of moments when they were gliding down the long incline to the station.

"This is where I left her," said Bill, as the cab, panting like an animal, with the haste it had made, stopped opposite the express windows, the lights of which showed yellow against the outer sunshine and the blue of the gas vapours which strove to escape from between the tall pillars of the carriage entrance.

The two young men leaped out of the cab and while Morris was paying the man off, Peter asked, in a low tone,

“Did you see where the lady went when she got out of the cab, Bill?”

“No,” the man answered, straightening his leg to shove the money Morris had just given him into his trousers pocket. “She paid me as we were runnin’ down, and as soon as a couple of guys had jerked the trunk off, I beat it.”

“Well—all right, Bill,” said Peter. “So long,” and with a friendly wave of the hand, the cabman, realizing that the curiosity which he felt would probably never be satisfied, proceeded on his way, while the young detective, followed by Donald Morris, began his investigations.

He made searching inquiries at every ticket window in the great, softly echoing main room of the station and at the express offices. He even went down to the waiting room of the Long Island Railroad and enquired there at all the possible places. No one remembered seeing, on the previous evening, a lady answering the meagre description Peter was able to give. Her costume was, obviously, conventional, and with her veil down, there had been nothing about her to attract attention.

Among the hundreds of people passing every hour through the vast station Anne Blake also had passed, leaving no trace.

CHAPTER X

A BIG TRUNK

BUT Mary!" groaned Donald Morris in agony, as the two men, their unsuccessful investigation over, stood for a moment in the vast loneliness of the great station. "I don't mind so much that we've lost all trace of her sister. It's Mary, Mary that I'm thinking about. Where has she gone? What has happened to her?" The fearful tension of the morning was apparent in every line of his weary white face. "Let Anne go! She's nothing to me! But find Mary, Clancy! Find Mary! Put every ounce of strength you have, every resource of your organization on it. Spend any amount of money. Leave no stone unturned. I'm afraid—I'm horribly afraid. She's——"

Clancy put a restraining hand on his arm, and even while he spoke he was wondering if the same sinister idea which was creeping into his own thoughts had already, by any possibility, found a place in Morris's less experienced mind. It was hardly probable, Peter comforted himself with the thought. A thing so far outside the experience of the young sculptor would scarcely suggest itself. And if it did, it would be necessary to combat it as long as possible, for in

that direction, Peter was sure, would lie madness for Donald Morris.

“We’ll get on the job at once, Mr. Morris,” he said, promptly, reassuringly. “We’ll search the city over to find any trace of her. She didn’t leave the apartment with her sister. We know that much, anyway. If she took another cab——”

“She’s almost certain to have done that,” Donald interrupted, eagerly. “She hated to walk through the streets, even for a short distance, and all the railroad stations are a long way from Waverly Place.”

“Well, if she took a cab, we’ll find it,” declared Peter, confidently. “But it may take a little time. I’ll have to go to the office now, and get things started. You can’t be any help about this part, and I’d advise you to get a rest. You aren’t used to this kind of thing, and it’s bound to knock you up. Go home and take it easy. I’ll ’phone you if there’s any news or if there’s anything you can do. Let’s get a cab, and I can drop you at your house on my way to the office. There are a few things I’d like to have you tell me, and that way we won’t waste any time. How about it?”

“All right,” answered Morris, wearily. “But I wish you’d let me go with you. Somehow I feel——”

“Yes, I guess I know how you feel, all right,” said Peter, “but it won’t be any good. You can’t help, and you need to get quieted down. Come on.”

With sympathetic consideration he led Donald to a cab, selecting one which had the front windows

closed, so that they might talk in privacy. As they turned into Seventh Avenue he said:

“Now tell me everything you know about Miss Blake and her sister. Every little thing. You can never tell what might come in useful. How long have you known them?”

“As you know, I’ve never met her sister, and know nothing at all about her, except that they lived together, and I’ve always had the impression that there was something—I don’t know just how to put it—something—well—wrong—about the sister,” said Donald, slowly. “Mary never let me come up to the apartment, and there was something odd in her face whenever her sister was mentioned. Of course it happened but rarely—and it’s a hard thing to define. Perhaps a person less interested would scarcely have noticed——”

Donald relapsed into thought. After a moment Peter said:

“And when was it that you first met Miss Blake?”

“About a year or so ago, it was,” said Morris, rousing himself, his eyes kindling. “I’ll never forget it! It was at my sister’s. I’d heard a lot about Mary Blake, and had seen her several times on the stage, of course. She seemed to me, even then, to be the most beautiful woman and the greatest actress of our time. My sister, Mrs. Atterbury, prides herself on knowing all the literary and artistic people, all the eminent musicians and actors in town. It’s almost a mild form of mania with her. And most of them re-

spond readily," with a little shrug, "but for a long time she couldn't reach Mary Blake, and the fact piqued her more than a little. Miss Blake's former manager, Arthur Quinn, guarded her like a dragon. It was amusing to see Helena—my sister—trying to cajole old Quinn, whom she knew well, into introducing her. It simply couldn't be done. But when poor Quinn died, and it was known that Miss Blake had signed up with Frederick Jones, Helena started to work on him. Jones, it seems, has social ambitions, and whether it was that, or what it was, my sister induced him to let her go behind the scenes one night and meet Miss Blake. Helena has a way with her, I must say, and somehow she prevailed on Mary to give a reading at the house, a thing she'd never done before, and has never done since. I don't know," he broke off, "why I'm telling you all these details, Clancy, only you said——"

"Go on, don't skip anything," said Peter, encouragingly. "So the first time you met Miss Blake was at the reading at your sister's house?"

"Yes, and, oh, it was wonderful, marvellous!" He spoke slowly, with the air of one who lives again one of the greatest moments of his life. "They used the big model platform at one end of my studio for a stage. The room, of course, was dark, and when the curtains were drawn aside, she stood there in the dim blue light, her face a pale oval, shining faintly, like a star." He had forgotten Peter. All his mind was filled with a poignant remembrance. "She spoke—"

and it was as if the stars sang together. . . . It didn't matter what she said. . . . The sheer magnetism of her personality, the beauty of the soul which looked out of her eyes—so near, so near—drew like cords of steel. . . . Her strange, sad face seemed, somehow, oddly familiar . . . as if I'd seen it before . . . in a dream, perhaps. It——”

The cab came to a sudden stop at a point of congested traffic. The change from the detachment and quiet of its smooth forward motion to the confusion and roar of the busy crossing brought Donald, with a jerk, back to himself. He glanced at Clancy a trifle confusedly, and as the cab went on, took up his story in a more normal tone.

“Everybody wanted to be presented to her after the performance was over, but she would meet no one except the family, Francis Atterbury and myself. She received us, for a few moments, on the stage, after the curtains had been drawn. She was gracious and charming, but insisted on leaving at once. She had told Helena that it would be necessary for her to do this, that she was very tired. She allowed me to take her down to her cab, and I said ‘Good-night’ to her in the dark street. . . . The next night I went to the theatre and sent my card to her, between the acts. She let me come behind the scenes, and I talked to her a few minutes in the wings. . . . After that I saw her with increasing frequency. We dined together rather often, in some quiet place.

The thought of attracting any attention to herself, when she was off-stage, was most distasteful to her—amounting almost to an obsession. That's a strong word, perhaps, but it almost seemed like that. She lived very quietly, and never introduced me to any of her friends. I don't even know who her friends are. I know absolutely nothing of her past life, except that it was a very unhappy one. I could not force her confidence and she volunteered nothing, not even when she must have known—must have seen——”

He hesitated, and Peter met his look with a slight, comprehending nod.

“I understand, Mr. Morris,” he said, gravely. “But didn't you think it was strange, don't you think it was strange now?”

“Yes,” Donald admitted. “But it doesn't matter. I don't care how strange it all is. I don't care who she is, or who her people were, or what sad or even terrible thing she is keeping from me. She is beautiful to me—in body, mind, and soul—a wonder-woman! There is no one like her in all the world, and I ask nothing of God but to give her back to me. I can trust her. I can be content to know nothing. . . . Only find her for me, Clancy! Find her for me!” He clenched his hands and his eyes burned deep.

Peter turned away his face.

“I'll do my best, Mr. Morris,” he said with grave sincerity. “What's possible to do, I pledge my word shall be done. By the way,” he added, in a changed

tone, "do you know Miss Blake's manager personally?"

"Frederick Jones? Yes," answered Morris, quickly. "I've met him often."

"He'd be willing to do you a favour, perhaps?"

"Yes—yes, I think he would."

"I may want to have a little talk with him," said Peter, reflectively. "Think you could fix it?"

"I'll give you a card," said Donald, at once, and drawing a case from his pocket, he wrote a few lines and handed the card to Peter.

"That ought to do it," said Peter, glancing at it. "Thanks. I may not use it, but it's best to be prepared."

They had turned into Gramercy Park. The cab drew up before the broad entrance of Mrs. Atterbury's house, and Donald Morris stepped out.

"I'm trusting you, Clancy," he said, as he held out his hand, "with something that is more important than life to me."

"I know," Peter nodded as he grasped the outstretched hand with a firm pressure. "I'll do my best," he repeated, reassuringly.

He sighed, however, as the cab rolled swiftly through the busy streets.

"Nobody's best is any too good in a case like this," he thought to himself. "He's a fine chap, all right, is Morris. I hope she's what he thinks her, and then some. . . . Wonder what kind of a woman she really is. He looks as if he might be a judge, but you

never can tell. . . . What is it she's been hiding from him—from everybody . . . except one person. . . . A woman as successful as she is wouldn't live the way she's been living, unless there was something. . . . And the sister? Dammit all, I can't see——”

He was still cogitating thus when he reached his office. He was thankful to find that his partner and old friend, Captain O'Malley, was in and at liberty. It was always a help, a clearance of his mind, to talk over a case with the astute, experienced old man who had trained him when he was a cub in the police detective service, and with whom he had been associated ever since.

The old man listened attentively while Peter detailed the facts as they had been presented to his notice.

“It looked like robbery,” Peter said, in conclusion, “but, I ask you, wasn't it intended that it should look like robbery, maybe? At least, isn't that on the cards? That broken window on the fire-escape was a blind. I'm sure of that much. I didn't mention it to Morris—thought he had enough on his mind as it was—but not only was the broken glass all on the outside window-sill, but the catch hadn't even been turned. Whoever broke the glass wasn't very fly, or else they got scared, for they didn't unlock the window.”

“Or else the thief stopped and locked it after he got outside,” said O'Malley, with a little chuckle.

“Rats!” exclaimed Peter, feelingly. “Quit your kiddin’, O’Malley. Don’t joke. This is serious. Both these women are missing, and there’s blood in the apartment and on Miss Blake’s scarf. We only know how one of ’em left the place. She left alone . . . with a big trunk. . . . It was a big trunk, O’Malley. I could tell by the marks it had made on the wall of the storeroom, and by the place where there wasn’t any dust at all on the floor. It was all pretty clean, but you just could see where the trunk had stood. . . . And then, here’s another funny thing—the closets in the bedroom were all full of beautiful clothes, the sort you’d expect Mary Blake to wear, and the bureau was, or had been, full of fine, expensive lingerie, before somebody chucked ’em around the place. Now, I figure Anne kept her clothes in the storeroom—and there wasn’t a rag there—nothing but a few almost worn-out things in an otherwise empty chiffonier.”

“And you argue from that——” said O’Malley.

“I’m not arguing,” said Peter. “I’m only thinking. It looked to me as if Anne had taken all her clothes (though there probably weren’t so many, judging by the number of hangers and the size of the chiffonier) and that Mary hadn’t taken anything. . . . Of course it’s only a guess. I can’t be sure. But that’s the way it looked. . . . And how would Mary get along without clothes—unless she might have been going to use Anne’s? . . . But they didn’t go away together . . . Morris has

the idea—and I got it myself from the letter he showed me—that there was a sort of—a kind of antipathy between them. Oh, hell, O'Malley! You see what I'm driving at—I've been mixed up with so much crime and stuff that I can't help wondering——”

“Yes,” said O'Malley, slowly. “Yes, I see. . . . The bloody scarf that the cabby pulled through the door . . . the blood on the floor of the hall just by the trunk-room . . . the big trunk. . . . H'm'm——”

The two detectives looked at each other long and seriously. Then Clancy brought his closed fist down on the desk.

“It's Anne—it's Anne I want to find, O'Malley! We'll look for Mary for all we're worth. We won't leave a stone unturned, as I promised. But if you ask me what we must do to get to the bottom of this proposition, I say—find Anne Blake!”

CHAPTER XI

FOUR PHOTOGRAPHS

YES. Find Anne Blake," O'Malley repeated, slowly. "But, in the meantime, son, you'd have to establish a motive, and it'd have to be some little motive, at that! And after all, you know, Miss Mary may turn up at any time. It would be easy enough for her to make a get-away and nobody see her. Suppose she slipped quietly out into the street and picked up a cab on the Avenue or somewhere? How'd we find that cab, I ask you? We don't know where she was going, and there wouldn't be anything to spot her by but a description or a photograph, if you can get hold of one."

"I can do that easy enough," said Peter. "Morris gave me a card to her manager and I can get one from him. I'm going to see him right away and find out what he knows about Mary Blake. He's the only person, so far, that can give me a straight line on her." He reached for the telephone and instructed the operator in the outer office to get Mr. Frederick Jones of the Westmoreland Theatre on the wire. While waiting for the connection, he continued his talk with his partner.

"Get out the drag-net for those two girls, O'Mal-

ley. Spread it all over the country and up into Canada. Comb the city with a fine-tooth comb. If Mary really hadn't any luggage, it's on the cards that she may not have left town. But," he shook his head thoughtfully, "I've got a hunch, O'Malley, that we won't find Mary Blake. The letter said, 'There'll be no one left but Anne. . . .' Whatever was to happen has happened . . . and I think—I can't explain it, but I feel it in my bones—that our only hope is to find Anne."

The telephone, at his elbow, buzzed sharply.

"Mr. Jones is very busy," Peter's operator informed him. "Can his secretary take a message?"

"Yes," Peter replied. "Let me have the secretary."

The connection made, Peter was informed that it would be impossible to see Mr. Jones that afternoon, and it was only by using Donald Morris's name that he was able to make an appointment for the following morning at eleven o'clock.

On Tuesday, therefore, prompt to the minute, Peter presented himself to the dragon (in the shape of a bobbed and powdered switchboard operator) who guarded the entrance to the offices of the Westmoreland Theatre Building. He had to assure her that he was not an actor out of work, and present his credentials, and it was not until his statement that he had an appointment had been verified that he was allowed to climb the three flights of stairs to the office of Frederick Jones, Manager. Even here he was

subjected to a maddening delay before he could gain audience.

When he reached Mr. Jones at last, however, he found him genial and cordial enough. The few lines which Donald Morris had written on his card turned the trick, and Mr. Jones expressed himself delighted to be of service.

Peter had had plenty of time to go over carefully his line of attack. He regretted the necessity, as he would have expressed it, "of putting any one wise," but, on the other hand, he felt confident that Mr. Frederick Jones must be well aware of Donald Morris's interest in Miss Blake. He was also sure that her disappearance would come to the knowledge of her manager in short order. He, therefore, went straight to the bat.

"I want to talk to you about Miss Mary Blake," he said. Leaning his elbow on the desk, with chin in hand, he regarded the manager keenly.

"What about Mary Blake?" Jones questioned, sharply.

"She's disappeared," answered Peter, without emphasis.

"What!" The manager started to his feet.

"She's disappeared from her apartment and left no address," Peter explained, quietly.

"Good God!" cried the manager, leaning over and beating his clenched fist on the desk. "Do you know what you're saying? But, of course, it can't be! Why, she was going to be in town all summer, and

we start rehearsal on a new play the middle of July! 'Dark Roads' ended its run last Saturday night. She must have gone off for the week-end somewhere. You're just trying to get a rise out of me!"

"I'm not," said Peter, gravely. "She's gone away for some time, and under peculiar conditions. So far, we haven't been able to find any trace of her. If you think I'm kidding you, you can call up Mr. Morris and ask him. He found out, accidentally, that she'd gone away, and he thought it was so serious that he called me in. I'm a detective," and Peter presented his business card.

The manager looked at it and dropped heavily into his chair.

"This is bad news for me, Mr. Clancy," he said. "Damn bad news. She's worth twenty-five to fifty thousand a year to me, I don't mind telling you, and if anything has happened to her—if she's gone off her nut—or anything—she's a strange sort of girl——"

"How, 'strange'?" interrupted Peter, his eyes narrowing.

"Well—she's the greatest emotional actress in the world to-day. You can take it from me. And I said it to Arthur Quinn, many and many a time, when he was alive. She can take the heart out of your body and wring it like a wet sponge. She's beautiful, and clever as the devil—but, like most temperamental people, she has her own peculiarities. And sometimes they were a bit hard to deal with."

"For instance?" prompted Peter.

“Well, for instance—she’d never rehearse without a full costume and make-up, and the lights just as they would be at performance. Said she couldn’t feel the part unless the conditions were all the way they were going to be. It made it necessary to get her costumes ready before we started rehearsal, and sometimes it was a damn nuisance.”

“But it doesn’t strike me that there was anything very unreasonable about that,” objected Peter. “Might be a bit unusual, but——”

“Oh, that wasn’t the only thing,” Jones broke in. “I couldn’t get her to meet anybody, not even people who would be useful to her. She would see a few newspaper men, but only in the theatre, between the acts. She objected to being photographed, too, and I had the devil and all of a time getting the right kind of publicity for her.”

“But you have some photographs,” said Peter, eagerly. “Surely there are some to be had. That’s what I want particularly.”

“Oh, yes,” grudgingly, “we’ve got some that were taken a year or two ago. Quinn didn’t seem to have so much trouble with her. He got a lot, and they are beauties, and good enough to use. She hasn’t changed any since they were taken. But people like to see new ones.”

“Can you spare me some?” asked Peter. “I can’t get very far without ’em, you can see that for yourself.”

“Oh, sure,” answered Jones, readily. “You bet I’ll do anything I can to help you.”

He touched a button on his desk and instructed the sleek youth who immediately appeared to bring him the photographs of Miss Blake. They were speedily produced, and Peter gazed at them with deep interest. There were four different poses, two full length, in evening dress, one of the head in profile, and one full face.

It was the latter which interested Peter the most. It was a striking portrait. The brilliant light, falling from above upon one side of the face, left the eyes in a transparent shadow, out of which they looked with a burning, compelling intensity. Haunting, magnetic eyes they were, full of dramatic possibilities. The nose was short and straight, with rather full nostrils, expressive of temperament and passion. The mouth was sensitive, not too small, and exquisite in its subtle lines and curves. The contours of the face were fine and beautifully modelled, the cheekbones and chin delicately defined. There was a nervous sensibility in the face, a tension and unrest about the pose of the head upon the slender, gracious neck and shoulders, which suggested an intense, artistic temperament.

“Great, aren’t they?” said Jones, looking at them as they lay on the desk between the two men. “Wonder what club old Quinn held over her to make her sit for ’em?”

“She and Quinn were great friends, weren’t they?”

asked Peter. "Do you know where he picked her up?"

Jones shook his head.

"Haven't the faintest idea. He had a way of snatching 'em out of the atmosphere, had Arthur Quinn, and he was tight as a drum about 'em all. Nobody had ever heard of her, so far as I know, and I know every possible bet, from the Keith Circuit up. My business. Quinn sprung her in the title rôle of 'Constance' the first shot out of the box. Don't know where she got her training, but she had it all right, all right, and then some. She never missed a trick, and she was a success from the drop of the hat. Of course Quinn was a wonder at putting 'em through a course of sprouts, but the girl appeared on the first night as if she'd been acting since she was a baby. Maybe they're born that way sometimes, but I never ran across one that was."

"I suppose she made a lot of money," hazarded Peter, following a train of thought of his own.

"Oh, lord, yes," agreed Jones. "I don't mind telling you in confidence, Mr. Clancy, that I paid her, on my last year's contract, a cool thousand a week."

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Peter. "As much as that?"

"I sure did," said the manager. "Why, look here. I guess I can show you."

He drew toward him a bank book, stuffed with vouchers, which lay upon the desk. Running rapidly

through the cancelled checks, he selected several and slid them across the polished mahogany to Peter.

“Just came in from the bank. End of the month,” he explained. “Run your eye over those if you don’t believe me.”

Peter did run his eye over them and very carefully. They were all made out to the order of Mary Blake and for one thousand dollars. He turned them over and studied the endorsements. They were all alike. At the top, in a clear, slanting, characteristic hand was written “Pay to the order of the Scoville Bank—Mary Blake,” and at the bottom, rubber-stamped, were the words, “Pay to the order of the Federal Reserve Bank of New York,” the date, and “The Scoville Bank of New York, William Dunne, Cashier.”

“I think I’ll make a call on Mr. William Dunne, Cashier,” thought Peter, still following an insistent undercurrent of suggestion, as he made a mental note of the name of the bank. “It might be of interest to know how much of this corking good salary she’s saved—and whether she—or any one else—has drawn heavily against it lately.” Aloud he said—

“That’s a lot of money, Mr. Jones! I didn’t know they got anything like that. I can see I made the mistake of my life when I picked my profession. Think you could get me a job?”

A slight grin made its way through the trouble and concern on the manager’s face.

“Better stick to your own job, Mr. Clancy,” he

said. "There aren't so many who make what Miss Blake does, believe *me!*"

Peter had gathered up the photographs and risen to his feet. Jones, following his example, caught his arm as he approached the door.

"For God's sake, keep me posted, Mr. Clancy," he said, anxiously. "I can't think she's thrown me down. Why, only about a month ago she had a pippin of an offer from a movie concern; far and away over anything I could afford to give her, though she does net me a lot. And do you think she'd consider it? Not on your life. She turned it down cold."

"What reason did she give?" asked Peter, curiously.

"Didn't give any, to me at least. I didn't know anything about it until Wolf, the producer, who's an old friend of mine, congratulated me on her sticking to me so tight. So, you see, I can't believe she's double-crossed me, and it's a pretty safe bet that I'll hear from her soon. If I do, I'll let you or Mr. Morris know."

"Yes, do, by all means," said Peter. "I'll keep in touch with you, and for the love of Mike, don't let the story leak out. I'm sure I can trust to your discretion, Mr. Jones."

"Oh, sure. Sure you can," promised the manager, easily. "It certainly wouldn't be to my interest to have it known—at least for the present."

Peter did not like that last phrase very much, but he did not dare to place in jeopardy his present

friendly relation with Jones by taking it up. He contented himself, therefore, with a smiling injunction to "keep it under his hat," and added:

"By the way, Mr. Jones, is there anybody else—anybody you know of that Miss Blake might be likely to write to?"

"I don't think there is a soul," answered the manager, frowning. "She had nothing to do with any member of the company; pretty up-stage with all of 'em, though not offensive about it exactly. Just kept 'em all at a distance—same as she did me, to tell you the truth. As I told you, she'd never meet anybody I asked her to—except Mrs. Atterbury, and I nearly dropped dead when she asked me if it would be O. K. for her to give a reading there. I was tickled to death, of course. Great ad. for her; but she never followed it up. Just like her," he grumbled. "Other than letting Morris take her around a little she let the whole thing slide."

"Had no social ambitions, evidently," Peter remarked. "And you never met any friends of hers?"

"Not a soul."

"Strange," Peter said. And again, to himself, as he hurried from the manager's office, he repeated, "Strange—so beautiful, so successful, and so alone. Why? . . . There was her sister, and there was Donald Morris and the manager. . . . And besides them, nobody—nobody but Angelo, and he'd only just seen her, as he couldn't help seeing her . . . And an old lady, a stout old lady, who called

there. . . . And the voice over the wire. . . .
It was an odd voice—unusual—I'm sure I'd know it
again, anywhere. . . . And, by gad, I'd give a
hundred dollars to know who was the owner of that
voice over the wire."

CHAPTER XII

A SIGNATURE CARD

PETER looked at his watch as he ran down the stairs of the Westmoreland Theatre Building. It was nearly one o'clock, and he decided that he would have time enough to snatch a bit of lunch before he made the attempt to see Mr. Walter Dunne, of the Scoville Bank. He stopped in at a public telephone booth in a cigar store, and called Donald Morris and O'Malley. To the one he reported what slight progress he had made, and from the other he received the information that he, O'Malley, had been down to the apartment and seen the janitor and that there was nothing new there. No one had called to see either of the sisters and no word of any kind had been received from them.

"Get the photographs down here as quick as you can," O'Malley urged. "I've wired our correspondents all over the country, but you know, Pete, they can't do such a hell of a lot without the pictures, and neither can the boys here."

"Send Maggie over to the Fifth Avenue Bank," said Peter, quickly. "I've got to go there, anyway. Have her meet me in half an hour and I'll give her the photographs. You can get them copied, p. d. q.,

and broadcast 'em all over the map, see. Tell her to meet me in twenty minutes, I can make it by then."

Hastily he hung up the receiver, snatched a sandwich and a glass of milk at a near-by drug store, met Maggie, his switch-board operator, at the Fifth Avenue Bank and delivered the photographs to her with instructions to rush them back to the office.

"Holy cats!" said Maggie, pensively, as she looked at the pictures of Mary Blake. "Ain't she sweet!"

"Never mind whether she's sweet or not, Maggie," said Clancy, hastily. "Put 'em in your bag, and don't lose 'em. Chase yourself back to the office just as fast as you can, there's a good girl—— And for the love of Mike, stop chewing that gum. You make me nervous! How many times have I told you——"

"But I ain't in the office now, Mr. Clancy. It's me lunch hour and me time's me own and me tastes is me own. If you don't like——"

"There, there, Maggie. Never mind," said Clancy, soothingly. "I didn't mean anything; but if there's one thing more than another that spoils a pretty girl, it's that infernal chew, chew, chew! It gets on my nerves."

Mollified by the subtle compliment, Maggie blew the offending gum nonchalantly into the gutter. "'S all right, Mr. Clancy," she said, and with a wide smile she flappered rapidly away.

Peter's errand at the Fifth Avenue Bank, where he and his partner kept their modest but reliable account, was to get a note, accrediting him to the cash-

ier of the Scoville Bank. The reputation of the firm of Clancy and O'Malley was above question, and the note was easily forthcoming.

Armed with this, Peter proceeded at once to the Scoville Bank and was readily admitted to an interview with the cashier.

Mr. William Dunne proved to be a pleasant young man of about Peter's own age, who looked attentively at the detective's business card, and asked him to state wherein he, the cashier, could be of service.

"I want to find out a few things about one of your depositors," said Peter, proceeding at once to business. "Anything you tell me will be treated in the strictest confidence, and I'm sure the questions I want to ask you can answer without any trouble. It's about Miss Mary Blake."

"H'm'm——" said the cashier. "Miss Blake, the actress? Yes. She has an account here. Been running up bills somewhere?" with a slight grin.

"Nothing of the sort," said Peter, readily, "though it may turn out to be a more serious matter than that. At any rate, it isn't anything against the lady. It's in her interests that I'm here."

"Why don't you ask her the questions you want to put to me, then?" asked Dunne, shrewdly.

"Because she's out of town and the matter is urgent," explained Peter, imperturbably.

The cashier hesitated.

"Of course I'd be glad to help you out in any way, Mr. Clancy," he said, doubtfully, "but the relations

of the bank to its clients are very confidential. We have to be very careful about disclosing anything of their private affairs. You know how you'd feel, yourself. We have to be very certain that we're not doing anything prejudicial to their interests."

Peter saw that it was necessary for him to be very frank if he were to gain the information he desired from this conscientious and astute young man. He, therefore, returned the cashier's questioning glance with an open, candid smile.

"I'm perfectly aware, Mr. Dunne," he said, "that all good banks protect their depositors' interests to the limit, so I'll just put my cards on the table. Miss Blake has disappeared, and her sister also, under most peculiar conditions, and I have been employed to try to trace them. I was summoned to their apartment by Mr. Donald Morris."

"Stephen Morris's son?" asked the cashier, quickly.

"Yes," said Peter, and seeing that the well-known name had its effect, he added, "Perhaps you'd like me to get him on the wire, and assure you that——"

"I don't like to seem to doubt you in any way, Mr. Clancy," the cashier interrupted. "I'd be very glad to be of service to any friend of Mr. Morris's. He has an account here. Suppose I get him on the wire."

This suited Peter perfectly. Knowing that Morris would be at home, waiting for news, he realized that there would be little delay, and waited imperturb-

ably while the cashier verified his statements. In a few minutes Dunne turned away from the telephone.

“So far, so good, Mr. Clancy,” he said, smiling. “Now bring on your problem.”

“Well, this is the way it stands,” said Peter, with an answering smile. “It looks as if Miss Blake’s apartment has been robbed. Of course we can’t be sure, because we don’t know what was there originally, but things were tossed about a lot, bureau drawers and desk drawers opened, and that sort of thing. And both the sisters have disappeared.”

“All right. I get that,” said the cashier. “Now what do you need to know about them?”

“First of all, do you know Miss Blake by sight?” asked Peter.

“H’m’m—I’ve seen her on the stage, yes. But I don’t recollect ever having seen her in the bank here.”

“Perhaps one of the tellers——”

“One of them might have, of course, but I doubt it. You see, I was paying teller, myself, up to a month ago, and as far as I can remember, it was always Miss Anne Blake who came to the bank.”

“You know her, then, by sight,” said Peter, eagerly.

“Oh, yes. She comes in almost every week. Quiet, retiring sort of woman, with a bad birth-mark.”

Peter nodded.

“When was she here last, Mr. Dunne? Do you

think you could find out for me? Would the tellers know her?"

"Think they would. In fact, I'm sure Parsons knows her. He was my assistant and is paying now. I'll ask him. Just a moment."

He left his desk, and went through a glass door at the back of the metal-latticed cages. Peter could see him, through the grille, talking to first one man and then another. Presently he came back.

"Miss Anne Blake was in the bank and cashed a check on Saturday morning," he informed Peter.

"On Saturday morning," Peter repeated, thoughtfully. "Do you know how much she drew?"

"I do," said the cashier, with a twinkle in his eye.

"Would you mind telling me, in strict confidence, the amount of the check?" asked Peter, persuasively. "I promise you, on my word of honour, that it'll go no further. You can see for yourself that, if there was a robbery, it's important for us to know whether there was any large sum of money in the house."

"I see," said the cashier, thoughtfully. "Well, I don't think there's any harm in telling you. The Fifth Avenue vouches for you, and Mr. Morris does, too. No. There can't be any harm. It was a check for five thousand dollars."

Peter sat up in his chair.

"Five thousand!" he exclaimed. "Five thousand dollars? Did she often draw as much as that?"

"No, never anywhere near as much as that before. And she took cash, too. Parsons warned her that it

wasn't very safe, these days, to carry so much money around, and suggested that she take it in A.B.A. checks. He thought she was going to, for she asked to see the blanks, and then she decided that she wasn't afraid to take the cash."

"I'm not awfully familiar with those checks," said Peter, apparently, for the moment, losing interest in his main subject, "but I understand they're a great convenience when you're travelling. Got one handy? I'd like to see one."

"Yes, they're great," said the cashier, producing a pad of blanks from the drawer of his desk, and laying it before the detective.

Peter looked at it for a moment, curiously.

"You sign here, in the body of the check when purchasing, don't you," he said, slowly, "and then, when you sign again, here at the bottom, it identifies you. Yes. Very clever. Very convenient. I'll remember, when I have another long trip to take. Thanks."

He sat considering in silence for a little time. Then he asked:

"How does Miss Blake's account stand with the bank? I mean, is it a joint account? Can she and her sister both draw checks against it?"

"Yes," Dunne answered, promptly.

"Then, if Miss Mary should—die—Miss Anne could still go on drawing against the account without any bother about a will, or anything."

"Naturally, but I don't quite see how this applies——"

“No,” agreed Peter, genially. “It probably doesn’t. I was only thinking——”

He continued thinking silently for a moment, then he went on:

“Would you feel that there was any harm in telling me how much money Miss Blake has on deposit here?”

“I really couldn’t do that, Mr. Clancy. It’s against the rules of the bank. I’m sorry.”

Peter grinned—computing swiftly in his own mind.

“Would I be safe, do you think,” he asked, “in extending credit to Miss Blake to the amount of twenty-five thousand dollars?”

The young cashier laughed.

“You would, Mr. Clancy. You certainly would.”

“Suppose it were necessary, and I doubled the credit?”

Dunne’s eyes twinkled with merriment, and he shook his head.

“I wouldn’t advise you to go much above that, Mr. Clancy,” he said, “but at the present moment you wouldn’t be risking your fifty thousand to any extent.”

The grin left Peter’s face, and his eyes narrowed. He had, indeed, found food for thought. A joint account, for about fifty thousand dollars, which would be entirely under Anne’s control if Mary—should die. Had he found a motive, a sufficient motive? And why had Anne drawn so large a sum on Saturday? Saturday! The very day before the one

on which Anne and Mary had both vanished, leaving no trace.

Did someone know of the large sum in currency which the sisters had in their apartment, presumably, on Saturday night? . . . But Anne, at least, had left the apartment, herself unharmed, on Sunday evening. That was an established fact.

And why hadn't Anne made use of the safe and convenient A.B.A. checks, as the paying teller had advised her? She had evidently considered doing so, for she had examined the blanks—and found, not only that she must sign them first when purchasing, but also that the signature at the bottom must agree with the one in the body of the check when it was cashed.

There was only one possible conclusion in the detective's mind. She did not wish to use her own name, and that was why she would not buy them of the bank where she was known. If she was clever, she would see that she could purchase the checks elsewhere and use any name she saw fit. Peter was confident that when, or if, they found Anne Blake, it would be under some other name.

These reflections occupied but a moment, so swift were Peter's mental processes. He had noted and tabulated each circumstance for future application to the problem in hand, and there had been scarcely a perceptible pause in the conversation when he said:

"I'm awfully obliged to you, Mr. Dunne, for the information you've given me. There's just one thing

more. Would you mind showing me any vouchers you may happen to have on Miss Blake's account? It would be a great favour."

The cashier pursed his lips, and shook his head.

"I'm afraid I really couldn't do that, Mr. Clancy," he said, apologetically. "Cancelled checks are the property of the client, and not of the bank. I could show you the signature card, if you'd be interested in that. It shows both signatures, if that's what you want to see."

Peter did not care to explain that he had hoped to get from the vouchers some clue which would indicate with whom the sisters were accustomed to have dealings, or that he might stumble on some other valuable bit of information. This proving impossible, he might as well look at the signatures. As O'Malley always said, "You never can tell——"

"Why, thanks. I would like to see them, Mr. Dunne," he said, "if it isn't too much trouble."

"Not a bit," responded the cashier, rising.

He passed again behind the network of grilles, and presently returned with the usual signature card in his hand. Seating himself, he laid it before the detective.

Peter examined the signatures carefully. Mary Blake's was, so far as he could judge, precisely like those he had seen at Frederick Jones's office, the writing rather large, and slanting in the ordinary way. Anne's signature was small and cramped and written "backhand," very different from her sister's gener-

ous, spirited writing. And yet, in some ways, they were similar, Peter noted; a fact probably due to long association. The e's, for instance, were formed in both cases, not in a loop, but like a written capital e, and they were separate, not joined to the letter k which preceded in the word "Blake."

Peter remarked these points in passing, but their full significance did not dawn upon him for many, many anxious days.

CHAPTER XIII

THE WOMAN AT THE PENNSYLVANIA HOTEL

HERE he is," said Captain O'Malley, as Peter, having made a quick trip from the Scoville Bank, entered the door of his partner's private office. "You're just in time, Pete. Fox thinks he's found the lady!"

"What, already?" said Peter, glancing sharply at the round, smooth face of the detective who stood beside O'Malley's desk. "And which one?"

"I think I've found Miss Mary Blake. But, of course, I can't be perfectly sure yet," answered Fox, thrusting forward his chin, eagerly. "I've been rounding up the hotels to see what ladies, travelling alone, registered on Sunday night. Been doing it ever since we got our orders, and I haven't had any luck till just about an hour ago. I'd gone all through the smaller hotels, thinking she'd sure pick a quiet one, and then it suddenly occurred to me that maybe she'd think she'd attract less attention at one of the big ones, and after running through several, I hit the Pennsylvania. Happens I know the clerk there, so he took some pains to help me. He was off duty Sunday, and there wasn't anybody registered that day that could possibly have been either of the Miss

Blakes. But, as you know, Clancy, they're pretty particular about taking any ladies without luggage, and Watson (that's the clerk) thought she might possibly have tried to get in and they wouldn't take her. So he got hold of the man that was on duty Sunday, and I gave him my spiel. This lad (Franklin, his name is) said there was a lady, very beautiful and young, that came into the hotel on Sunday evening, about seven, and wanted a room. She didn't have nothing but a small handbag, and she was so pretty Franklin was leary of her and said they were full up. So then I asked him if he had any idea where she'd gone, and he said that she seemed so kind of timid and upset about not getting a room, and she didn't look exactly like a rounder (though you can't always tell, at that), so he suggested that she might go over to the station and talk to the Travellers' Aid officer that's always in the women's waiting room; that she could find out there some respectable boarding house she could get into."

"Yes?" said Peter, eagerly, as Fox paused for breath.

"Well, that sounded good to me, so I beat it over to the station, and sure enough, the Travellers' Aid woman there did remember that a pretty young woman come in Sunday evening and that she'd recommended a boarding house on Twenty-sixth Street, where they take nothing but women. Then I chased over to the boarding house, and sure enough, she was there, all right. I saw the landlady. She's a re-

spectable woman, enough, but it's a big house that caters to a transient trade and I guess they can't be too particular. Anyhow, she said the girl looked all right and paid for a week in advance, so she should worry. I described Miss Blake to her, and she thinks it's her, all right. I couldn't do nothing more without a photo, so I beat it over to see if we'd got one yet; and that's as far as I've gone."

"Sounds good so far," remarked O'Malley. "What do you think, Pete?"

"Well, it fits what we know, as far as it goes," said Clancy. "But the acid test'll be matching this girl up to the photograph. Have you got the duplicates yet, O'Malley?"

"Just come in, not five minutes ago," answered the old man, reaching for a large envelope which lay upon his desk. "Pretty good service we're getting from the Swift Camera Company. They're swift in something more than the name. Here, Fox, here you are." He held out four unmounted photographs. "You can't make a mistake with all those for comparison, but see her yourself, and make sure."

Fox scratched his head.

"But how'm I going to get a chance to compare 'em?" he asked, doubtfully. "The landlady says that the young woman, who gave her name as Mrs. Florence Smith, keeps in her room the whole time. She don't go out at all. Has her meals sent up. Says she's nervous about meeting strangers, but it looks to me as if she was hiding."

Peter and O'Malley exchanged glances.

"Find out anything else?" asked Peter, with increasing interest.

"Only that she hasn't had any more luggage sent in. Just had nothing but the handbag she come with. And that she'd written and sent out one letter since she come, and last night, the only time she's been out at all, she asked where was the nearest place she could send a telegram."

"Wonder when she sent that letter, and if it was by messenger," said Peter, reflectively. "You didn't happen to ask, did you, Fox?"

"No, I didn't, Clancy. Does it matter?"

"Well—— I don't know—— Might—— But that'll be easy enough to find out from the landlady, I guess," said Peter. "Anyhow, the whole bag of tricks sounds pretty interesting, Fox. We're bound to follow it up. Somebody's got to get a peek at her by hook or by crook."

"But how?" asked Fox, irritably. "How am I going to get at her? I can't go and bust into her room. And if she never leaves it——"

"She'll have to leave it sometime, son," said O'Malley, soothingly. "All you'll have to do is to stick around, and sooner or later she's bound to come into the open."

This suggestion of "watchful waiting" made no appeal to Peter, however. He thought a minute, and then said to Fox:

"There's a way of getting to her and I'll bet I find

it. Your feet get cold too easy, Fox, and you've got no imagination. I'll take this thing on, here and now. Come on and lead me to that landlady, and I'll show you how the thing can be done."

Fox, grumbling inwardly, did as he was bid, and the two men proceeded as fast as possible to Twenty-sixth Street. There he introduced Clancy to the landlady, a lean, middle-aged woman, of respectable appearance, with a cold, calculating blue eye.

"I don't know why I should help you to see Mrs. Smith," she said, in answer to Peter's request. "She's paid her board and lodging in advance, and she's quieter'n any lady in the house. I don't know you, and——"

Peter interrupted her.

"Mrs. Comfort," (for, inappropriate as it seemed, this was the landlady's name) "Mrs. Comfort," he said, "we don't know whether or not Mrs. Smith is the lady we're looking for. And, in any case, there's nothing against her and we mean her no harm. The lady we're looking for"—he fixed her with his eye and touched his forehead significantly, shaking his head in apparent commiseration—"has left her friends, and has left no address."

"You mean she's crazy?" asked the landlady, in a horrified whisper. "I thought she acted kind of queer. I can't bear crazy people," she shivered.

Peter was quick to follow up his advantage.

"But this may not be the lady we're looking for, Mrs. Comfort. We only want to make sure. It

would be too bad to worry you if we're mistaken. One thing: She sent a letter out since she's been here. Do you happen to know when it was she sent it?"

"Yes, I do know that, positive," said Mrs. Comfort, uncomfortably. "She asked Lily, the waitress, to take it out when she went home Sunday night."

"Was it to go by messenger?" asked Peter, quickly.

"I don't know."

"Would Lily, do you think? And whom the letter was addressed to? Do you imagine she'd remember? Could you ask her for me, Mrs. Comfort? If I knew the address on the letter, I might not have to see Mrs. Smith to make sure."

"No," irritably, "I can't ask Lily, for the simple reason that she hasn't showed up so far this week at all."

"Too bad," said Peter. "Well, never mind, Mrs. Comfort. It won't matter to me, anyway, if you'll fix it so we can find out whether this Mrs. Smith is the lady we want. You will fix it, won't you?" His tone was very persuasive.

"Well," hesitated the landlady, rubbing her long nose with a bony forefinger, "it'd ease my mind to have you see her since what you've told me. But how can I? I've got no right to let you go up to her room. This is a respectable house, and——"

"I know it is," Peter agreed, cordially. "It's got a fine reputation, Mrs. Comfort. But even if you don't have men boarders, surely you must have men in to make repairs, or something. How about the

telephone? I could go in to inspect the telephone. You could come along with me if you like."

"But there's no telephones in the rooms," objected the landlady. "What d'you think this is? The Ritz?"

Peter was checked for the moment. He glanced around the lace-curtained parlour for inspiration. The house was an old one, and lighted by gas. The fact, immediately noted, gave him an idea, and he was about to suggest that he go up and pretend to do something to the burners in Mrs. Smith's room, when a sharp ring at the front door bell interrupted him.

"Them girls downstairs is so slow." With an annoyed gesture Mrs. Comfort turned quickly, passed through the open double doors of the parlour, and herself opened the street door.

Peter heard but one sentence—and he was out in the hall in the twinkling of an eye. Without a word of explanation he snatched a yellow envelope from the outstretched hand of an elderly "messenger boy" who stood upon the threshold, dropped his own hat on the hall table, unceremoniously appropriated the cap of the astounded messenger, and turned swiftly to Mrs. Comfort.

"Which room?" he whispered. "Quick!"

"Third floor back," gasped the landlady. "But you can't——"

Peter did not wait to hear her expostulations. He dashed up the stairs and was out of sight before she could finish the sentence.

He stopped for an instant before the door of the third floor back, to get his breath. Then he knocked softly.

“Who’s there?” The voice had a startled, anxious ring.

“Western Union Telegraph,” Peter answered, in a quiet, assured tone.

The door opened the least crack, and then was flung wide, the envelope snatched from his hand and torn open, the contents devoured. Peter stood stock still, with wide-open eyes.

“Oh, thank God! Thank God! He’ll take me home. He’ll take me back! Oh, father, dear father!” She was sobbing, beside herself. She turned, blindly, to Peter. “How do I get this? This money?—I want to go home. To go home to California. He’ll save me from Roger. He’ll protect me. I won’t have to bear anything more. I’ll be free, at last!” The words tumbled wildly over each other, and again, almost without taking breath, she asked, “How do I get this money?”

Peter saw it all in a flash. The woman, hiding from a husband who had ill-treated her, the father who had sent the money, faster than on the wings of the wind, to bring his daughter home. . . . It was an old story, with, Peter hoped, a happy ending, for the girl was beautiful and appealing—though not in the least, except in generalities, like the portrait which he carried inside the breast of his coat.

CHAPTER XIV

ONE CLUE

AND this sort of thing was destined to be Peter's experience for many days to come. Every waking hour, and many when he should have been sleeping, was spent in following up clues unearthed by eager detectives, spurred to incessant action by the large reward which Donald Morris had privately offered for any news of either or both of the sisters.

Morris had been inclined, at first, to limit the reward to news of Mary.

"I care nothing about the sister, Clancy," he said. "What does it matter to me where she is, or what she does? It's Mary—Mary——"

The agonized appeal in his eyes was almost more than Peter could bear. The two men, so unlike, but with the bond of one common interest, had become, in those few days, fast friends. Peter could not bring himself even to hint at the sinister possibility which had presented itself to his mind and to Captain O'Malley's. Hardened as they were to the terrible crimes which were committed in this great city every day, the possibility of murder—a word which they had not whispered, even to each other—was not one which Peter would willingly suggest to the client who

had become his friend. It was, therefore, with great difficulty that he persuaded Morris to make the reward applicable to news of either of the sisters.

“If we can only find Anne,” he said to O’Malley, after Morris had reluctantly consented, “I promise you I’ll put the screws on her and find out what happened to Mary Blake, if it’s necessary to have her arrested for murder to do it. You watch me! *I’m going to find Anne!*”

But for once, for all his confidence in himself, Peter seemed destined to failure. Each day and all day long and far into the night, all over the country, sharp-eyed men and women trained to the last keen edge of observation and inquiry sought for the missing women.

And always there were clues. Their name was legion, and Peter did not dare, in his own words, “to pass one up,” for fear that it might lead true, at last. It seemed impossible that there could be so many unexplained women as were unearthed; so many women with birthmarks, so many who were young and dark, and to the observer’s eager eye (dazzled, perhaps by the amount of the reward) so like the photograph which each detective carried about with him.

In his investigations, Peter travelled the country over. A swift journey to St. Louis—and failure. Returning, he had no more than reached his office, when a report came in of a young woman, with a conspicuous birthmark, who had recently taken ob-

scure lodgings in a back street in Philadelphia. The cases of those who were supposed to be Anne Blake were the most difficult to cope with and took the most time. A decision could only be reached, in some instances, by finding out the antecedents of the suspects, and by determining that the person in question was definitely in some other place on the twenty-eighth of May, for there was nothing in Peter's possession with which to identify her except a meagre description.

He had made time to amplify this to the fullest extent possible. To this end, he had called again on the janitor, Angelo Russo, at the apartment in Waverly Place, late in the afternoon following his experience with the *soi-disant* Mrs. Florence Smith.

He had gone quietly into the old apartment house and, unheralded, had sought the janitor in his own domain. In the dark, stuffy basement, he had interviewed Angelo and his invalid wife, who appeared almost too ill to answer any questions.

"She not know noding 'bout noding," Angelo said, interposing his short body, protectively, between Peter and his wife. "She sick long time. Doc', she say mus' have fresh air—count-ree. How get him, me? Try ev' way I know, Godalmighty! but no good—Angelo have no lucka—only troub'—jus' troub'."

"Did your wife ever see Miss Anne Blake?" asked Peter, touched, in spite of his preoccupation, by the poor, stupid Italian's sincere distress. "That's all I want to know."

“Yes. Me seen her long time 'go,” said the wife, in a thin, weak voice. “Long time 'go,” she repeated, sadly.

“Could you describe her to me? Tell me how she looked?” asked Peter, kindly. “A woman sometimes sees more than a man.”

But the poor woman's powers of description were little better than her husband's. She insisted, however, that Anne Blake was not thin, “not skinny,” but—Peter supplied the word—slender. “Yes, she was slen', but stronga. Me see her lif' biga heavy ting, carry 'em 'roun' lika easy. No, not skinny—what you say, slen'? Yes.” This was the only way in which her description varied from Angelo's.

After leaving the Russos, Peter had found two or three tradesmen, in the immediate vicinity, who knew Anne Blake by sight. He was able to determine from them that her appearance was, in a general way, such as before described. As to the birthmark, one or two thought it was on the left, and the others thought it was on the right, cheek. One perhaps fanciful lady, who owned a small bake shop, said she remembered it well, and that it was certainly on the right cheek, extending down on the neck. That it looked to her something like the mark of a hand, a big spot below, and four—or was it only three—smaller ones, running up on the cheek. “Dark it was, like blood, an' awful to have upon ye, the poor thing!”

This was all that Peter had to go upon in his subsequent attempts to trace Anne Blake, and only once,

after investigation, had he been at all assured that he had found a genuine clue. This happened on the Wednesday following the disappearance.

He had sent a woman detective to interview the matron of the women's waiting room in the Pennsylvania Station. This detective found that the neat coloured woman, in charge of the pay dressing rooms, remembered seeing a veiled lady come in there on Sunday evening. She couldn't be sure, but she thought it was after five. It was not very long before the time when she went off duty, and that was at six. She recollected, too, that the lady had some sort of disfigurement on her face. She had received the fee and opened one of the pay dressing rooms for her, but whether it was because the lady stayed in there till after her time was up, or for whatever reason, the coloured woman had no recollection of seeing her again.

And after three weeks of almost incessant toil this was the one thing Peter had learned. Porters and conductors of every train which left the Pennsylvania Station on that fateful Sunday night had been personally interviewed. Not one remembered seeing any such lady as Peter described. As far as he was able to learn, Anne Blake might have vanished into thin air.

The search for a cab which Mary Blake might have taken on that Sunday evening had proved equally fruitless. The city, as Peter had promised Donald Morris, had been gone over with a fine-tooth comb.

All the big taxi companies, the smaller garages, and all the "free lances," from the Bronx to the Battery, had been investigated, to no purpose. No one had seen Mary Blake leave Waverly Place and every trace of her was utterly lost. Like her sister, she had slipped out of sight, leaving no ripple to betray her passage.

"It looks as if the only chance of getting results would be to let the story leak out to the papers," said Peter to O'Malley, late one afternoon toward the end of June. "Mr. Morris is dead against it. Thinks that Miss Mary would hate the publicity worse than anything in the world. And even if we could persuade him to let us go ahead and practically advertise, even then I'm not any too hopeful." He sighed, wearily. "I don't see, in any case, why Anne should come out of the woods. Dammit! If she'd only draw some of that money that's lying up there at the Scoville Bank, it might give us a look-in. But they haven't heard a word. I'm sure she's got plenty of funds in hand, all right, and is lying low. Wonder how she figures to pull out that money without any one getting wise as to where she is."

"I've been puzzling about that, too," said O'Malley. "Seems as if she'd have to take somebody into her confidence to put it across, but if what we've doped out is true, and Mary Blake never turns up, for the simple reason that——" He made an expressive gesture.

"That letter keeps coming back to my mind,

O'Malley," said Peter, reflectively, "the one Mary wrote to Donald Morris. And one phrase sticks in my crop—'There will be no one left but Anne, if I fail——' It looks like what we thought—and yet—somehow I can't get it out of my head——" Suddenly he banged his fist down on the desk and jumped to his feet. "I'm going through that apartment again, O'Malley," he said. "I've been trying to ever since—but some damned bright-eyes thought he had the whole thing cinched, and I've had to beat it somewhere on a wild-goose chase. But I'm through with that for the present. I don't care who has a pipe dream, induced by too big a reward, I'm going to see if there isn't something in that apartment that'll give us a lead. If we could only find out where they came from, and who they knew, it might give us a line on where they'd be likely to go. The way it is, we've just about come to a standstill, as I see it. There must be something left in the place where they've lived for several years that would be a hint to the guy who was able to take it. That key's been burning in my pocket all these weeks, and tonight I'm going to use it, see! I don't want any gallery, so I'm going late, just before the street door's closed for the night. That's at twelve o'clock. I'll try to fix it so that I don't run into the janitor."

"Oh, I guess you needn't be much afraid of that, from what Rawlins says. He's been pretty well fed up with just watching the house when there's been absolutely nothing stirring, and he's sort of made

friends with Angelo to keep from being bored stiff. And the poor old devil, Angelo, I mean, is just about crazy on account of his wife. She won't go to a hospital, and there he is, taking care of her and trying to hold down his job at the same time. With the result that he's only upstairs when he can't get out of it. So——”

“So you think there's no fear of my running into him,” concluded Peter. “Well, I don't suppose he'd beef about it much, but you never can tell with these ignorant foreigners. They sometimes have an attack of conscience in the most unexpected places. I won't take any chances. I'll get Rawlins to give me the tip when he's out of the way——”

“I guess it would be as well, at that,” said O'Malley. “But what do you expect to find, Pete? You went over the apartment pretty thoroughly the first day, didn't you?”

“I did take a good look,” answered Peter. “It was as thorough as I could make it at the time, and with Morris champing at the bit. But I'm not entirely satisfied—haven't been all along. There's a queer feel about the place, O'Malley. You may think I'm getting fanciful in my old age, and I can't explain to you just what it is that seems—— The place is shut in—airy enough, and all that, you know, but cut off from the rest of the world. . . . You have the sort of feeling that almost anything might happen there—and no one the wiser. . . . The windows are all covered with curtains that are thin

enough to let in the light and air but thick enough so you couldn't see a thing from the outside. They're not the usual sash curtains, but run from the top to the bottom of the windows, and there's a rod through them at the bottom so they can't blow—and there are thick, dark shades. . . . Of course it might be that way in any apartment where the outlook wasn't very attractive—and it may be just that. . . . You may think I'm a nut, O'Malley, but I've got it into my old bean that there was something more—a purpose—I don't know what. . . . But I'm going to find out. The thing's got me going. I'm going to find out, O'Malley, if it takes a leg!"

CHAPTER XV

THE DUPLICATE KEY

IT WAS a dark night, hot and close, with a feel of thunder in the air. The big arc lights near the arch in Washington Square made spots of copperas green on the close-trimmed grass and flecks of emerald on the full summer foliage of the trees. Above, the sky was velvet black, thick and solid, like a pall, except for the faint, pulsating glow of heat lightning over in the west.

In the short length of Waverly Place the shadows lay deep, like those at the bottom of a cañon. At the far end shone the lights of Broadway, dim here in comparison with its upper reaches of flashing electricity. An occasional car banged and rumbled on its way north or south, serving to accentuate the silence of the short cross street.

It was nearing midnight when Peter Clancy alighted from the stage at Fifth Avenue and made his way eastward. When he reached the corner of University Place, he whistled softly, five notes in a minor key. That simple little call was as familiar to every man on his staff as the notes of a robin to a country-bred boy.

Immediately a shadow, among the shadows on the

south side of the street, moved toward him. Peter advanced quietly.

“That you, Mr. Clancy?” A voice from the moving shadow, and as it came closer, Peter could just distinguish Rawlins’s face.

“Anything stirring, Rawlins?”

“Not a damn thing,” the man replied, disgustedly. “This is a hell of a job to put a live man on, Mr. Clancy. Been hangin’ around here for weeks, and not a soul to speak to but Sullivan and the dago over there——”

“Angelo swallowed the story of your being a plain-clothes watchman for the bank here all right, didn’t he? He hasn’t any suspicion——”

“Not a suspish,” said Rawlins, confidently. “He and I are good friends, all righty—and I can’t help being sorry for the poor devil. He’s such a fool, and he’s up against it, sure enough. He ought to send that wife of his to a hospital.”

“Those people haven’t any sense about that sort of thing,” commented Peter. “But never mind that now, Rawlins. Just slip over and see if the coast is clear. I’m going up to the apartment for a bit, and I’m not looking for an excited audience. Beat it over, and give me the high sign if he’s out of the way.”

Peter waited in the dark entrance next to the American Bank, which was directly opposite number Ninety-nine. He saw Rawlins’s short, wiry figure silhouetted against the dim light which burned in the

hallway of the house across the way; saw him disappear in the darkness at the other end of the passage.

It seemed a long time to Peter's impatience before Rawlins again appeared and, like a shadow, flitted across the street. He was out of breath when he reached Peter, and chuckling softly to himself.

"What's up?" asked Peter, sharply. "What are you laughing at, Rawlins? Let me in on the joke."

"Gee!" exclaimed Rawlins under his breath. "I'll bet the Federal authorities would give a good deal to have heard what I just did. Say, Clancy, did you ever hear that the dagoes in this old burg have got a real, honest-to-God lottery going strong under cover somewhere?"

"Oh, there are always rumours like that going around," said Peter, carelessly. "The Chinese and the French and the Italians. What's that got to do with the price of cheese?"

"Why," said Rawlins, still chuckling, "there's a man over there with Angelo in his little front room—I gum-shoed through the hall and part way down the stairs, and I heard 'em talking. Angelo is crazy because he's lost some money on the thing, poor devil, and he talked louder than I guess he knew. They both spoke Italian, but you know I'm a shark at lingo, Clancy," with evident pride.

"Yes, I know," said Peter, impatiently, "but we aren't here to sleuth out things for the Government. I'd have been interested awhile back, but I've got something else on my chest now. D'you think

Angelo is likely to come up in the next few minutes? That's all I want to know."

"I should say, from the start he's got, that he'd go on cussin' his friend for some time," answered Rawlins, grinning in the dark at his recollection of the little Italian's language. "If you chase over right away, you'll make it without any trouble. Angelo is what you might call occupied just about now."

"All right," said Peter, softly.

Swift and quiet as a cat, he crossed the street, passed through the gas-lighted hall, and up the stairs.

There was no gas burning on the third landing, from which he deduced that the apartment was still unoccupied. The fourth floor also was perfectly dark and Peter had to flash his electric hand-light upon the door to fit his duplicate key.

The lock grated with an uneasy sound and the door swung slowly inward. Still, black darkness, which could almost be felt, confronted him. Peter stepped across the threshold, and without a sound, carefully shut the door.

The closed rooms, after the oppressive heat of the outer world, seemed damp and cold, and Peter shivered slightly. In his rubber-soled shoes he made no sound as he advanced into the living room, flashing his light carefully about to avoid colliding with anything.

There was little fear of being seen from the outside, since the buildings opposite were used for business purposes, and empty at this time of night, but Peter

was taking no chances. His first move was to pull down the dark shades at the windows.

Remembering the way the outer halls were lighted, he struck a match to light the gas, and found, to his surprise, that the apartment was equipped with electricity. He had not noticed it before, or if he had, it had made no impression on his then preoccupied mind. He saw nothing significant in it now—was glad of the more brilliant light in which to make his investigation—that was all. There was a candle lamp over on the desk and a big, shaded lamp upon the table. Peter switched on the smaller lamp.

In the quiet light which illumined the room he could see that it was just as he had left it over three weeks before. A little dust had drifted in through the chinks of the windows, filming the polished mahogany of table, chairs, and couch, but otherwise there was no change, except that the scarf, which had proved an open sesame to a world of anxiety, had been removed. But Peter knew all about that. He, himself, had taken it to VanDorn and Sawyer to have the stain upon it analyzed. They found it to be, what he felt sure from the first it was, human blood. The scarf lay, now, in the safe at his office.

Peter went into the bedroom and pulled down the shade, lest some wakeful person in the houses on the street above might catch a gleam from the light which he had left burning in the living room, and become curious. Then, softly, he crept into the dining room and lowered the blinds there, then into the

kitchen, where he noted that the broken pane of glass had been replaced according to Morris's careful instructions to Angelo on the day it was discovered. He had felt, with Morris, that it was an unnecessary risk to leave it in a condition in which any sneak thief might have entered from the fire-escape with perfect ease.

Peter drew the dark blue blind down to the sill, and flashed the cold eye of his hand torch about, looking for a light fixture. He found it in the shape of an old-fashioned gas chandelier with two burners, suspended from the ceiling. He lit them both. The gas burned high, with a soft, secret hiss. It sounded loud in the remote stillness of the place, and automatically Peter lowered it to the point of silence.

Then, supplementing the light from above with the clear gleam of his torch, he searched the kitchen with microscopic thoroughness, but found nothing which could be supposed, in any remote way, to have a bearing on his problem. The two significant details, the fallen glass upon the outside of the sill and the sliver of ice in the sink, which he had noted on that perplexing Monday, having disappeared, the kitchen had no other revelations to offer.

He proceeded to the dining room, with a like result. Except for the disarrangement of the sideboard already noted, the room was evidently just as it ordinarily appeared when tenanted. Again he noticed that there was but one chair drawn up to the small round mahogany dining table. The rest were

standing tidily against the walls, and he wondered if only one person had partaken of the last meal which was eaten in that room.

Passing into the hall, he sent the brilliant eye of his flash back and forth across the dark waxed floor. It was thinly covered now with a light, feathery dust. It would blow into the little gray rolls that the hospital nurses call "kittens" if the air was let in.

"Gad, I wish I could open the windows," thought Peter. "The air's as dead as——"

He paused before the open door of the small storeroom, still looking at the floor. There was one spot here where the dust had collected thickly. A big round clot of it lay there and several smaller spots. Peter, with a slight faint creeping of the flesh, stepped carefully across this part of the floor and entered the storeroom.

The only window here gave upon a narrow light-shaft across which was the window of the bath adjoining. There were only thin muslin curtains at these windows, but at this midnight hour probably no one would notice the light at the top of the shaft.

"Anyhow, I'll have to risk it," said Peter, half aloud, "I've got to make sure about this room."

There was only gas here, as in all the rear of the apartment, but the flow was good and the light fairly strong. Again Peter noted the slight abrasions of the wall where he concluded the other trunk had stood, the trunk which Bill, the taxi driver, had found so heavy, the trunk which Anne Blake had taken

away with her to a destination which still remained veiled in mystery.

The size of the trunk was—Peter measured from one little sharp indentation in the wall to another—three feet four or five inches—and from the floor, approximately twenty-four inches.

“Big enough,” Peter muttered to himself. “Big enough for—almost anything.”

He folded up his pocket rule and turned to the large brass-bound trunk which had been left standing against the wall.

“Makes me feel a bit like a burglar, but it’s all in the day’s work,” thought Peter, as he knelt beside it and inspected the lock. “I guess I’ve got you,” his thought ran on, “you’re easy,” and he took a large bunch of small keys from his pocket, and after a few minutes’ work, found one that fitted.

A sharp crack of the lock, and Peter lifted the lid. The odour of camphor, in a great whiff, filled his nostrils, almost choking him. He drew back and took a long breath.

“Gosh, they’ve used plenty of it,” he exclaimed, half aloud. “I’d be sorry for the poor devil of a moth that took a chance with that!”

Carefully he lifted up the ends of the various articles in the trunk, in such a way as not to disarrange them. Except for a pair of woollen blankets at the bottom, there was nothing there but winter clothing of various sorts. Extremely various sorts, Peter saw, for first there was a magnificent evening

wrap trimmed with almost priceless fur. Beneath it lay a plain, rough, dark, heavy winter cloak rubbed a little at the cuffs and collar, as with constant wear. There were carriage boots, satin, lined with fur, and next them, wrapped in newspaper, was a pair of high, fleece-lined goloshes, old and shabby. Peter looked at the date on the newspaper.

“The *Planet*, May 25,” he read. “Somebody packed this trunk not more than three days before— Well, I don’t see where that gets you, old top. Come get a move on.”

In replacing the bundle of goloshes, he noticed that an article had been cut from the paper, not torn out, but cut with sharp scissors. The fact merely caught his attention in passing.

“Probably a notice of ‘Dark Roads,’” he thought, and dismissing the subject from his mind, he went on with his task. It proved somewhat trying, owing to the camphor fumes, which became more overpowering as he delved deeper into the trunk, and once they became so strong that he sneezed.

He tried to choke it back, but it would come, a loud “Atchi!” which resounded horribly in the stillness.

Peter held his breath and listened. Nothing stirred. Far away he could hear the faint “whir—ee—ee” of a passing street car, over on Broadway, and the low murmuring of thunder overhead, but within was the silence of the tomb.

“Cheerful, I calls it,” said Peter, to himself, draw-

ing a long breath. "Well, I guess that'll be about all here."

He closed and locked the trunk, flashed his light inside the open drawers of the small white chiffonier, and found nothing that could give him any help. Not a letter, not a card. No piece of writing of any sort. The very few articles of clothing which remained were old and worn. A pair of gray leather gloves, shabby with wear, still held the shape of slender, long hands. There was something almost pathetic about them as they lay there, palms upward, an appeal—but Peter was in no mood for sympathy.

"Anne Blake's things, without a doubt," he thought, "and too worn out to bother with. . . . And her winter stuff packed away with her sister's. . . . I wonder if Sherlock Holmes would make anything out of that. Does it mean that she plans to come back in the fall? Or are they all things she has no further use for? And, if so, why pack 'em away so carefully? . . . And just a few days before—she—quit. Was the whole business 'sudden at the last,' as they say of people who are a long time dying?" He shook his red head in perplexity. "Well, no use trying to think it out now, Peter. Let's get all the dope and then patch it together the best we can."

So saying, he slipped softly down the hall, throwing his brilliant light over every inch of the floor and walls. Almost without sound he drifted from the hall into the bedroom and stood still, looking about

him. There was electricity here, and he boldly switched on the lights in the ceiling. The resulting illumination was so bright that it made him blink.

Then he proceeded with his investigation.

Nothing in the waste basket, nothing, not even ashes, in the small, old-fashioned grate; nothing left in the few pockets he discovered with exceeding difficulty, in the various rich articles of women's apparel which hung in the two closets. Nothing of any interest in the rifled drawers of the big highboy, nor in the empty drawers of the dressing table. A little drift of pink toilet powder still clung in the corner of one of them and there was a tiny smear of red on the inner side of the same drawer. Peter touched it and found that it was a trifle greasy and made his finger-tip rosy-red.

"Rouge. Aha, my lady," he chuckled, with a little grimace, "beauty isn't always even skin deep." And for the hundredth time he wondered if Mary Blake was all that Morris thought her. "Not that a little paint and powder is anything against a girl these days, when every flapper, from fifteen to fifty, makes up for the street, and some of 'em pile it on so thick you'd think they must have put it on with a trowel—in the dark. Well," he looked about him, "there's no excuse for her if she didn't do it right." He reached out and switched on the lights on both sides of the mirror, at the back of the dressing table. His pleasant, homely freckled face appeared in the glass, dazzlingly illuminated. "Humph! Mary

took no chances of not looking her best, I'll say that for her," he thought. "But I wish to God she'd left me some real light on the problem she's stacked me up against, instead of all this spotlight stuff. . . . Well—I guess there's nothing here. Now for the living room."

He turned off all the lights, and went through into the room at the front. Here the little candle lamp on the desk threw a gentle, intimate glow over the rather austere old furniture and neutral-tinted walls. There was nothing here that even remotely suggested the theatrical; none of the customary signed photographs, and but few pictures. Over the mantel, the Mona Lisa smiled her enigmatic smile, there were a few fine old Japanese prints, and that was all. In front of the centre window, on a slender pedestal, was an exquisite little plaster cast of an Andromeda, chained to a rock. Scratched in the base was the signature, D. V. L. Morris.

All these generalities Peter could see in the quiet light, but they did not appear to have any particular significance. He felt that he needed all the light, both mental and material, that he could get, so without wasting any precious moments he took off the shade of the lamp which stood on the table and turned on both its high-powered bulbs.

Again, as on that first day, he stirred the dead, cold ashes in the fireplace. No, there was nothing. Every particle of the paper was consumed. He could not even tell what sort of papers had been

burned. Sighing, he rose and looked again about the room. On each side of the fireplace were built-in shelves laden with books and magazines. There was a good deal of fiction which Peter had never read. Thackeray, George Meredith (Stevenson, Peter knew, and heartily approved), Henry James, Edith Wharton, and many others, including the novels and plays of Bernard Shaw. There was a good deal of poetry, and many plays, old and new. On the top shelf stood a worn set of Shakespeare, in a quaint, old-fashioned leather binding. Without knowing just why he did it, Peter took down one of the volumes at random. It chanced to be "Julius Cæsar," and on the fly leaf, in a bold, flowing hand, was the name, "Winthrop Curwood."

"Winthrop Curwood," Peter repeated, half aloud. "I've heard that name before somewhere. . . . Winthrop Curwood. . . . No, dammit, I can't place it. . . . And anyway, it may not mean a thing. The books are old enough to have been bought second-hand. I'll just see——" He ran rapidly through a number of the older books. The name did not occur again. "However, I'll just make a note of it. There doesn't seem to be any other owner's name written in any of 'em," he thought, and in a little pocket memorandum book he copied the name "Winthrop Curwood," in his clear, microscopic hand.

In returning "Julius Cæsar" to his place on the top shelf Peter's hand struck a pile of magazines

which were closely stacked at the end. One of the slippery pamphlets loosened, and in a rush the whole lot came cascading down.

Peter caught his breath, and thanked his lucky stars that there was no one in the apartment below. As he carefully returned them to their place he noted with some surprise that besides the more popular magazines of the day there were a number of scientific and medical journals, and several copies of a publication called *Beauty*. He had never even heard of this latter, and glanced through one or two copies curiously, smiling a little, in spite of the seriousness of his quest. There appeared to be no end of ways in which one could heighten one's beauty, and no practical limit to the absurdities which were recommended for the purpose. That someone had taken the suggestions seriously there could be little doubt, for in several cases articles had been carefully clipped from the body of the magazine. This had also happened, in one or two cases, in the medical journals. Peter wondered, in passing, what the subjects treated had been, but could form no idea, since the entire article, in each case, had been cut away.

Peter had always been fascinated by people's books, their selection was a matter so strongly indicative of character. But in this instance the evidence was distinctly contradictory. "A lot of high-brow books," he thought, "and some of the rest of the stuff so low-brow it makes even me feel intellectual. Did Anne pick out one kind, and Mary the other—and

if so, which? Oh, well, it's no use to speculate now. Better get on." He resumed his painstaking inspection.

He had saved the desk till the last. Here, if anywhere, he was sure he would find what he so ardently sought. And yet, never in his life had he found so non-committal a lot of papers as were in the drawers and scattered on the floor. A great mass of press notices, with the little yellow slip of the clipping bureau still attached, were mixed up with plain white letter paper and envelopes. There were a few business letters from Frederick Jones, but not one from Mary's old manager, Arthur Quinn. In fact, there were no strictly private letters to either of the sisters, and he could find none at all addressed to Anne.

To avoid the smallest chance of missing anything, Peter had seated himself beside the desk and had drawn out, one by one, each of the four drawers, placing them upon his knees while he minutely examined the contents.

Satisfied, at last, that there was nothing to his purpose in any of them, with a feeling of deep discouragement he slid them back into their places. They all ran in with the ease which one encounters only in very good old American-made furniture—all but the bottom drawer on the right. This slipped in smoothly until it was nearly shut, and then stuck.

"Oh, damn," said Peter, and pushed it hard.

It would not move. He pulled it out and pushed

it in again, but it would not close completely. It did not really matter in the least. He had found the drawers open and there was no reason why this one should not remain so, but any one who has ever started to shut a drawer knows precisely how Peter felt. That drawer simply had to yield before he could go on with anything else . . . and perhaps . . .

Peter jerked the drawer out, and dropped to his knees, while his right hand sought and found the flashlight in his pocket. There was a slight click, and a brilliant glare lit up the recess into which the drawer should have gone.

Peter uttered a forcible exclamation, and stooping low, groped with his long fingers in the back of the recess, and drew out a small rectangle of stiff pasteboard. At some time it must have fallen from the upper drawer and remained, perhaps for years, undiscovered. It had evidently fallen slantwise across the corner of the back when the drawer was pulled out, and had been slightly damaged by Peter's efforts to close it.

He automatically straightened a bent corner as he hastily took it over to the table where the bright light from the lamp could fall full upon it.

Apparently, it was not an especially valuable treasure-trove. Just a small old *carte-de-visite* photograph of a little girl in a plain, somewhat countrified "best" dress of the last of the Nineties. She appeared to be about seven or eight years old,

and the childish face, which looked up at Peter, was one of such transcendent loveliness that he, always a lover of children, caught his breath.

Peter took an unmounted photograph from the breast pocket of his coat, and laid the two portraits, side by side, upon the table.

There could be no doubt. They were the same, they must be the same. The gay, laughing, exquisite child's face had developed into that of a wonderful, sad, but equally beautiful woman. The great eyes, with their long, dark lashes, the small, straight nose, the curving lips, were the same. Only the expression was different, an unfathomable difference. The spirit behind the eyes must have undergone a complete metamorphosis to have made the apparent change.

"It's Mary Blake, all right, all right. I'll bet my life on that," muttered Peter to himself. "Mary Blake——"

Quickly he turned the little photograph over. There was no writing on the back, as he had hoped, instead, in elaborate, filigreed lettering was printed the words—

WALTER LORD, Photographer
Hobart Falls, New York.

"By gad," exclaimed Peter under his breath, bringing his closed fist softly but with emphasis down upon the table. "The first look-in we've had.

The very first! Hobart Falls, New York. That's where she must have come from—or somewhere near there, at least. . . . And Walter Lord. . . . Who can tell what Walter Lord may know . . . if he's still there—and alive."

With a rapid motion he slipped the two portraits into an inner pocket and buttoned his coat over them.

"I'll find out something about her, at last! My hunch about coming here wasn't all to the bad. In this way I'll bet I find out something about the secret past of Mary Blake—and Anne——"

With eyes alight with the first hope he had known for many a day, Peter put back the shade upon the table lamp, readjusted various things about the room so that they should be, as near as possible, in the order—or disorder—in which he had found them, switched off the lights, and crept softly to the door.

Gently, gently, with one hand on the latch and the other on the lock, he turned the two knobs and drew open the door. As he did so a clock somewhere outside in the darkness boomed "One, Two."

"Two o'clock," thought Peter, as he sped noiselessly down the stairs. "Not much sleep for me tonight. I must find out where Hobart Falls is and beat it for the first train in the morning. I've got a feeling in my bones that I've struck something at last. A little light thrown on the past may reflect on the future. Who knows? Anyhow, it's up to me not to leave a stone unturned. . . . And I'm curious

. . . damn curious: . . . I'd like to know . . .”

A street door closed, with a faint, soft creak, and the lean figure of the young detective slipped away into the hot darkness.

CHAPTER XVI

ROSAMOND CURWOOD

A CLEAR, bright day followed the heavy thunder shower which had occurred late in the night. Peter, as he boarded the train for Hobart Falls, hoped that it was an omen.

He had just had time for a few minutes' talk with O'Malley, in which he gave his partner instructions about reaching him if anything of importance should transpire during the day.

"Better wire me at Hobart Falls," he said. "Have it left in the telegraph office to be called for. I can't tell where I'll be stopping and I can't think of any other way I'd be sure of getting it. I don't believe there'll be anything."

After that, he had hastily called Donald Morris on the telephone and explained briefly that he was rushing out of town on a new scent.

"Another false clue?" asked Morris, wearily, and Peter saw, in his mind's eye, the pale, tired face of his client.

"May be," said Peter, in a friendly, hopeful tone. "But you never can tell. We mustn't miss a trick and I've found something I'm bound to follow up. It may lead to nothing, of course, but there's always a

chance. I'm in a deuce of a rush just now and I'll have to wait till I get back to tell you about it. Don't get discouraged. While there's life, there's hope. While there's life——” he repeated to himself as he hung up the receiver—“I wish to God I could be sure that Mary Blake is still alive. Well, anyway——”

He made the nine-thirty train for Hobart Falls with four minutes to spare. “Which is enough for anybody,” thought Peter, as he watched the ugly houses and factories slip by.

The railroad ran northward on the west side of the Hudson, for Peter had ascertained Hobart Falls to be situated in the Catskill Mountains. After a time the train slipped from behind a range of hills into a tunnel and out again, and Peter, startled from his deep absorption, saw below him the great river, shining blue and silver, in the morning sun. No one who has ever seen it thus suddenly could fail to be impressed by its beauty and grandeur. Peter, city-bred as he was, was strongly affected by the sight of the blue-green wooded hills, lapping and overlapping, and the great, serene river winding in between.

His thoughts ran—“I wonder if I'll be lucky enough to find Walter Lord, and what he'll know.
. . . Gee, those rocks are corking, and those big, soft pines. . . . It was a long while ago—maybe twenty years since they wore that kind of clothes.
. . . That's a house, way up on that mountain!

Must have a ripping view. . . . And he may be dead by now. . . . But he mustn't dare to be—I need him too much. . . .” And so his mind ran on, alternating between hope and discouragement, through the hours that followed.

He had to change cars twice, each time to a road of narrower gauge. “The next'll be roller skates, I should think,” he said to himself as he jerked and bumped along in the little mountain train.

It was about four o'clock in the afternoon when they ran in to the tiny, ugly, red-painted station of Hobart Falls. They had passed through a number of stations, vociferous with red-faced hackmen and seething with fat, jewelled, and overdressed Hebrews of the middle class. This little place was quite different. There were no big hotels or boarding houses in the immediate vicinity, and so few people that only two trains a day stopped at Hobart Falls. The loungers about the station were obviously country-bred and American.

Peter quickly approached one of them and asked where the telegraph office could be found. He wished to ascertain at once if there was anything from O'Malley.

The man jerked his thumb in the direction of the waiting room. “In there,” he said, briefly, “ticket office,” and, with stupid, bovine eyes, watched the stranger as he disappeared inside the station.

“Nothing ain't come fer nobody to-day,” said the agent, in reply to Peter's inquiry.

Peter stepped swiftly out again upon the platform, and looked about him. Blue hills and valleys surrounded the little station on every side. In the middle distance could be seen one or two small farmhouses, and in the immediate foreground, drawn up close to the platform, was a decrepit, dingy Ford. A long, lank man, sitting at the wheel, glanced up at Peter expectantly.

"Is this for hire?" asked Peter, indicating the ancient car with a motion of his head. "And can you take me to the village?"

The driver grinned at a man who was leaning against the edge of the doorway, and spat, generously, over the wheel.

"Git in," he said, laconically.

Peter threaded himself into the back seat, and the weary flivver, with a heavy groan, started down the empty road.

"Any p'tickeler place?" asked the man at the wheel, turning his weather-beaten face, and looking Peter over from head to foot.

"I think I'll want to spend the night here," answered Peter, a trifle dubiously. "Is there a hotel?"

The man laughed. "This ain't no metrolopus," he vouchsafed, "but I guess the Widder Lord'll put you up for the night, if you'd like to go there."

The "Widder Lord." Peter's heart sank, but he only said, "That'll do all right, I guess. Take me there, will you?"

At that moment they turned a sharp corner, and Peter saw why the driver had grinned at the lounge on the station platform. The village, what there was of it, was not four minutes' walk from the station, but quite out of sight, hidden by the small, wooded shoulder of a hill.

It was a sleepy, quiet little place, shut in by rolling upland. There was one long street, or, rather, a wide place in the road, on each side of which were small, old village houses, mostly painted white, with green shutters. There were two stores, one of which was also the post office, and a blacksmith's shop. In front of the latter stood an old-fashioned buggy with empty shafts. From within came the ringing clink of metal upon metal. Save for an old dog wandering down the street, and a few loose hens dusting themselves in the road, there was no sign or sound of life.

"Rip Van Winkle might have taken his twenty-year nap right here in the middle of the street, instead of going to all the trouble of climbing up one of those mountains," thought Peter. "No wonder there aren't any Jews here. This place sure would cramp their style, and then some. . . . Wildgoose chase I've come on, anyway, I feel it in my bones. Walter Lord is probably as dead as the rest of the village." The silence got on his nerves and he spoke to the driver. "Think the Widow Lord will be awake when we get there?" he asked.

The man turned a sardonic, screwed-up eye upon

him. "'S next house," he said, pointing, "and we'll be there in one shake of a lamb's tail. What'd she be asleep this time of day fer?"

Peter looked without much interest at the house indicated. It was old and gray and weather-beaten but had evidently once been the considerable house of Hobart Falls. Low and rambling, it faced the street, standing a few feet back, among some ragged, flowering shrubs.

Suddenly Peter's eye lightened and he reached over and caught the driver's shoulder.

"Stop here," he said, sharply. "This is the place where I want to stop."

"Sure it's the place ye want to stop," repeated the driver, disgustedly. "Ain't I been tellin' ye? This is the Widder Lord's."

"Oh, yes. I forgot for the moment." The light faded from Peter's eyes. "The '*Widder* Lord's'," he muttered, inwardly. "The man's dead, of course. However——"

He glanced again at the object which had raised a sudden hope within him. At the far end of the house, standing out at right angles from it, and partly hidden by vines, was an old battered sign:

WALTER LORD

PHOTOGRAPHER

"I've got the right house, anyway, and without any lost motion," thought Peter. "And that's the luck of the Irish—as far as it goes."

He paid the driver the "two bits" suggested as the amount of the fare. The sum was paid so unconcernedly that the driver lingered while Peter stepped quickly up to the front door and rang the old jangling bell. A man as free as that with money didn't come to Hobart Falls so often.

Peter had made up his mind that he would spend the night there, in any case, if the "Widder Lord" would take him in. He knew he would have to take a taxi (he thought in city terms) to Kortenkil, two stations below, to catch the midnight train, which did not stop at Hobart Falls, if he were to go back to town that night, and the thought of bumping over the bad roads in a pre-historic flivver, after being up most of the previous night, made no appeal to him.

"I'll make her take me in," thought Peter, and rang the bell again.

"Anybody want me?"

The voice came from just over Peter's head, but he could see no one, for the roof of the little old Dutch porch hid the speaker.

"Who wants me, Josh?" the voice repeated.

"Nobuddy wants you, Walt," the driver in the road bawled out. "'S a stranger wants to spend the night. 'S yer sister-in-law to home?"

Peter's heart leaped harder, if not so far, as his long legs. One jump, and he was on the narrow brick walk, looking up at an open window from which protruded the quaintest old head he thought he had ever seen.

The face was that of a man of seventy or more, but the hair and long sweeping moustache were brilliantly black. The hair was thin and carefully brushed forward above the ears, in a bygone style. Two little twinkling eyes looked down from either side of a long, thin, pointed nose—looked down at Peter in mild surprise.

“You wanted to stay the night, Mr. — uh——”

“Clancy,” Peter supplied, eagerly. “Yes. I want to look around Hobart Falls a little. Could you—— This is Mr. Walter Lord, isn’t it?” He glanced aside, as if for verification, to the half-hidden sign.

“That’s me,” replied the owner of the craning head, with a smile. “That’s me, all right.”

Peter’s heart settled down to a steady beat.

“Well, Mr. Lord,” he said, “it’s just like this. I’ve got a little business here in Hobart Falls, and I want to spend the night. Josh,” he spoke as if the driver, who still lingered, were an old and intimate friend, “Josh thought Mrs. Lord would take me in. I’m sorry she’s away, but couldn’t you manage to put me up? It’d be a great favour.”

“Aw, take him in, Walt,” urged Josh, from the road. “’N let me know if you’ll need a hack again, Mister. I got the best car in the Falls.”

Peter was anxiously watching the face above him.

“Well, you see, Miranda not being here, and all— makes it kind of hard. She’s awful particular about the linen closet, and I don’t know what sheets——”

“Never mind the sheets,” Peter interrupted,

quickly. "I'll sleep on the floor, if necessary. I've just got to stay to-night, Mr. Lord, and if you don't take me in——"

"Wait a second, and I'll come down," said Walter Lord, disappearing from the window with the abruptness of a Jack-in-the-box.

"He'll take ye, all right," Josh called out, encouragingly, as he turned his little car. "Lemme know when ye want me agin," and was gone, in a cloud of dust.

"If you wouldn't mind coming around this way, Mr. Clancy——"

The entire figure of Walter Lord disclosed itself at the corner of the house, and the figure was in strict accord with the face. Slender, bent, and old it was, but almost jauntily clad. Light gray trousers, somewhat stained with chemicals, were carefully pressed into a knife-like crease down the front. A double-breasted waistcoat of starched white duck sported a long festoon of old worn gold watch-chain. Around his neck was a standing collar with tall points, and so large that it made his thin neck look, so Peter thought, like a lily in a pot. About the collar was tied a long, black "shoe-string" tie of silk. He was just settling his thin shoulders into a wide-lapelled, square-tailed, black broadcloth coat which he had obviously donned for the occasion.

"Come this way, Mr. Clancy," he repeated. "The front door sticks in this warm, damp weather, for we scarcely ever use it. All our friends come in

here," and with a gracious, hospitable gesture, he held open the side door for Peter to pass.

Peter had just time to notice that there was a small outside stairway leading to the second floor, built on at this end of the house, and that, upon the second floor, there was a fairly good-sized slanting window, and on the roof a skylight. "The photographic studio," thought Peter, as he followed Lord into the house. As he crossed the threshold, he unostentatiously dropped his small handbag just inside the door.

"I'm afraid I can't make you very comfortable, Mr. Clancy," said the old man, doubtfully, drawing forward a sagging rocker with an elaborate "tidy" on the back. "Won't you sit down? My sister has gone over to Letty Bowen's just for the day and to spend the night. She'll be home in the morning. Too bad, too bad. There's only a cold supper. D'you mind cold suppers? I rather like 'em myself, this hot weather—and I said to Miranda, 'I'll be as happy as a clam at high tide.' But I didn't expect to have a visitor. (Let me take your hat.) Not that I'm not always glad of company. Miranda says I'm worse than misery. (Misery loves company, you know. Her joke.) But I do like to see new people—new faces. Keeps you young, don't you think?—Oh, I almost forgot. Do have a cigar——"

He slipped one thin, stained hand into his breast pocket and drew out a Pittsburg stogie of the longest, thinnest, and stoggiest type. Peter shuddered in-

wardly and ventured to ask if he might smoke cigarettes instead. "Perhaps you would have one yourself, sir," he added, noting a funny little twinkle in the old man's eye.

"Well—you know——" Walter Lord spoke with slight embarrassment, at the same time reaching out an eager hand, "I must say I do prefer 'em to cigars, but Miranda, well, she kind of feels that—that cigars are more suitable for a man of my age—and so——"

He lit one of Peter's cigarettes, inhaled a long, delicious whiff, and smiled gently.

"Dear old duck," thought Peter, "with the heart of a kid, and scared to death of his sister-in-law. Bet she's a Tartar. Thank heaven she isn't here."

Peter leaned his head back against a large yellow butterfly worked in wool on a black background, crossed his long legs and smoked leisurely, with the air of a man at ease.

"There must be a lot of good fishing around here," he remarked, taking a long shot at a possible hobby of the man he had determined should be his host. "Crossed a lot of likely looking streams as we came up through the mountains."

He saw, by the expression of Walter Lord's face, that he had made a bull's-eye. The little man leaned forward and spoke with enthusiasm.

"There's the best fishing to be found in the Catskills just beyond that meadow over there," he pointed out of the window. "You can't see the stream from here, on account of the tall grass, but

it's fine, open fishing and just full of trout. Of course they're not very large, but along at the beginning of the season I caught one that weighed two pounds. Yes, sir. He was a beauty. And there are more of 'em, if you know the pools. I could show you——”

After that, Peter had things pretty much his own way. The talk ran largely on flies and tackle. (“He was sure to be a fly fisherman, if he fished at all, the good old sport,” thought Peter, smiling at his host.) Peter told a story of some wonderful fishing he had once had, up in Nova Scotia, and Lord capped it with an experience of his in the Adirondacks when he was a boy—and so the minutes flew.

There was no further question as to Peter's spending the night there. The lonely old man was too eager for society, and too trusting and unsophisticated to raise any objections to the harbouring of an unheralded guest, particularly since the guest was a fisherman, and a fly fisherman, at that.

If Walter Lord had any idea that Mr. Clancy had come to Hobart Falls with a purpose other than to investigate the fishing possibilities of that region, his curiosity on the subject was completely held in check by his innate courtesy.

In the first few minutes of their acquaintance Peter's quick mind had invented several stories to account for his presence there. He hesitated between the advisability of being a doctor, seeking a good site for a sanitarium. (“For patients troubled

with insomnia, this would be ideal," Peter grinned to himself.) Or, perhaps, it would awaken more sympathy to have a young wife who was ill, and needed mountain air and seclusion.

But before he had talked with the old man very long Peter conceived a deep distaste for subterfuge. "Dammit all, I won't lie to the good old scout unless he makes me," he said to himself, as he watched Walter Lord making his fussy little preparations for supper, and listened to his constant flow of pleasant chatter as he passed back and forth from the kitchen.

"Cold lamb and some of Miranda's currant jelly," he said, as he placed a blue platter and a sauce dish filled with a truncated cone of wobbling, clear crimson upon a small table near the west window. "Beautiful, rich colour where the sun strikes it, isn't it?" He stepped back to note the effect. "Let me see, there's a salad, too. Lettuce from our own garden, Mr. Clancy. Pretty late for lettuce, but I plant it right along through the summer and it does real well. Oh, I almost forgot the pot cheese."

He bustled out in the kitchen and presently returned with a crisp salad and a yellow bowl brimming with creamy cheese.

"The coffee's almost ready, and it'll be good, too," he chuckled. "Miranda thinks strong coffee, three times a day, is bad for my nerves, but I made this myself, and I'll bet you won't get a better cup of coffee at the St. Denis Hotel." (Peter had told him that his home was in New York.) "I used to go

there quite a bit when I was younger. It's a grand, good place, don't you think so, Mr. Clancy?"

His tone was so wistful, so full of pleasant pictures and recollections, that Peter hadn't the heart to tell him that the old St. Denis had vanished long ago. He only said that it certainly was one of the best places in New York, and let it go at that.

In a few minutes they were seated on either side of the little table near the window, a simple but bountiful meal spread between them. The westering sun gleamed on the quaint old blue-and-white china and on the jug of larkspur and madonna lilies which Walter Lord had moved to one side of the table so that he could look at Peter as they ate and talked.

Peter had but one object, for the moment, and that was to captivate the mind of his host, a feat which his experience and ready Irish wit made easy of accomplishment. He told some stories which brought tears of laughter to Walter Lord's little, twinkling eyes, and made him rock backward and forward in his chair. In order to invite the old man's confidence, Peter told some of his early experiences. Truthful stories they were, in the main, only slightly embellished, and most effective in their skilful blending of humour and pathos—but in them was no hint of Peter's present profession.

By the time supper was finished, Peter had achieved a footing of such friendly intimacy that he was allowed to help clear away. And all the while he had been studying the little old man, whose

quaint appearance would have been simply ridiculous to one less sympathetic than Peter Clancy. To him, the dyed hair and the jauntily worn old-fashioned clothes spoke aloud of a spirit of undying youthfulness and simplicity, a heart kept young by the love of all things beautiful, a mind so filled with imagination and artistic longings that it had selected a thing as impractical as photography for its profession.

Peter thought of the little, sleepy village and the emptiness of the wooded hills, and could imagine how few were the sitters who came to Walter Lord's old photographic studio. And he wondered, in that remote spot, what incentive kept the light gray trousers so carefully creased, the linen vest so stiffly starched, the old, worn broadcloth coat so immaculately brushed.

"He must be like 'St. Ives'," Peter concluded, at last. "Since there's no one else to dress for, he 'dresses for God.'"

They had left things tidy in the kitchen, and now, at ease in their pleasant relationship of host and welcome guest, they sat beside the open west window, smoking limitless cigarettes and talking endlessly.

Peter, looking always for an opening for the introduction of the subject which was uppermost in his mind, carefully guided the old man into speaking further of himself and his pursuits, a matter presenting no difficulties whatever, for Walter Lord had many hobbies and rode them with an enthusiasm which age could not abate.

He learned, among other things, that the Lords had once been well off, but that the family estate had dwindled before Walter and his older brother, Tom, came into possession, and that after Tom had died and left his elderly widow and the remainder of the property to Walter's care, it had suffered still more.

"I did the best I could," said the old man, wistfully, "but there it was—I always felt that I could have made more money if I could have gone to New York—but Miranda—and the old house—they seemed sort of to anchor me."

"And your photograph studio, Mr. Lord. I should think you'd have hated to leave that," said Peter, at last boldly approaching the subject deepest in his thoughts. "By the way, speaking of photography"—he smiled and leaned forward across the table, confidentially—"you may be surprised, but I've seen some of your work. It's bully, too!"

"What?" cried Walter Lord, excitedly. "You don't say so, Mr. Clancy. Some of my work in New York! Now I wonder who it could have been. I've only taken pictures of people around here—and there aren't so many—it's never been what you could call a paying profession, and Miranda—— But never mind. Whose picture was it that you saw? And how did you know that I——"

"By George, I believe I've got it with me," said Peter, slapping his pockets, the while his heart beat quickly. Now or never—"Here it is, sure enough," he added, gleefully—and laid the small carte-de-

visite, the sole trophy of his midnight quest, face upward on the table.

There was a moment of suspense while the old man carefully adjusted his glasses and took the old photograph up in his hand. Peter watched his face, narrowly. It had been many years. Would he——

“Why! Why!” exclaimed Walter Lord, in tones of deep surprise. “Why, how, in Heaven’s name, Mr. Clancy, did you get a picture of—of little Rosamond Curwood?”

CHAPTER XVII

ANOTHER PHOTOGRAPH

ROSAMOND CURWOOD!" Peter's heart skipped a beat and then raced on again. Could he have been mistaken? But no! He had found the picture in her apartment, and it could be no other than Mary Blake. He was sure, positive. . . . And Curwood? With a click, his mind fastened the connection. . . The name he had written in his notebook—the name in the old set of Shakespeare—Curwood. Winthrop Curwood!

Though he had been staggered for an instant, Peter resumed the conversation with scarcely a perceptible pause:

"It's Winthrop Curwood's daughter, isn't it?" he said, smoothly, watching closely the old man's expression.

There was immediate and unqualified acquiescence in the eyes of Walter Lord. "Yes. But where did you get it?" he asked again, wonderingly. "I thought——"

"Yes?" Peter encouraged, as the old man hesitated.

"It seems odd to me that you should have her picture."

There was a slight emphasis on the last pronoun, and for the first time Walter Lord looked at Peter with almost a hint of—was it suspicion?—in his eyes.

“I just ran across it in an old desk,” Peter hastened to explain, “and I kept it because it’s such a pretty kid, and the photograph so well taken. Looks as if she was just going to speak—and you can almost hear her laugh. I don’t know the original——”

“But you knew who it was.” Lord’s tone was puzzled.

“Yes. I knew who it was,” said Peter, easily. “Beautiful little thing, isn’t she? It was a fine subject for you, and I must say you’ve done it justice.”

Peter had struck a very vulnerable spot. Walter Lord’s faint feeling of suspicion, if so strong a term may be used, melted away before the frank praise of his work.

“Not bad, not bad at all,” he said, smiling now, “and, as you say, she was a beautiful child. The most beautiful child I ever saw,” dreamily, “except her mother—Anne Blakeslie.”

“Anne Blakeslie—Anne Blake——” Peter repeated to himself, thoughtfully. Aloud he said:

“So you knew her mother, too? Isn’t it strange how things come about? The world is a little place, after all.”

The banality of this last remark did not strike Walter Lord. Instead, he seemed to think it quite an effective sentence.

“The world is small, Mr. Clancy. Yes, the world is a little place, after all,” he agreed. “Here you drop into Hobart Falls so unexpectedly, and come to my house, which you couldn’t possibly have heard about—and all the while you have a picture of one of Anne Blakeslie’s children in your pocket.”

His innocent wonder made Peter feel almost ashamed. But the matter was too important for squeamishness, he assured himself. That last remark—

“So there was more than one child,” said Peter, quickly. “Were they all as beautiful as this—this Rosamond?”

“There were only two,” answered Lord, reminiscently. “Two twin girls. The other was named for her mother.”

“Anne?”

“Yes. Anne and Rosamond,” said the old man, gently.

“Did you know them well?” asked Peter, and added—“It’s such a funny coincidence, altogether. Makes me sort of curious about them.”

Walter Lord leaned back in his chair, folded his arms, and gazed out at the red gold of the summer sunset.

“Yes,” he said, softly. “Yes, I knew them well. That is, I knew the children—and their mother—I knew her best of all——”

There was something in Walter Lord’s quaint old face which kept Peter silent. He could not interrupt

with the questions which were burning to be asked. He would let the story come in its own way. . . . After a moment the old man went on:

“Yes,” with a little sigh, “I knew Anne Blakeslie—you might say I’d always known her. She lived on a farm, up back in the hills, and we both went to the little brick school house down at the end of the village. Guess you didn’t see it. It’s just around the turn of the road.”

“No,” said Peter, softly, so as not to break the thread of the old man’s thought.

“Yes—we saw each other every day—until I went away to school—and when Tom died, and I had to come home to stay—Anne Blakeslie had grown up in the meantime, and she was beautiful—beautiful in soul as well as in body—or, perhaps, it wouldn’t have happened——”

A purple cloud drifted across the setting sun. Its shadow fell softly upon the old face.

“What was it that happened?” prompted the younger man, gently.

“Why,” Walter Lord roused himself with an effort, ‘it was about that time she must have come to know Winthrop Curwood. It’s sort of an odd story. Maybe you’d like to hear——”

“I would.” Peter’s answer should have left no room for doubt.

He was conscious, as the old man proceeded with the story, that it was the drama of Walter Lord’s life. Sometimes he forgot Peter altogether; at other times

he was aware of the younger man only as a ship that passes in the night. He spoke him in passing. It did not matter how much he told. They would never see each other again, in all human probability. As one sometimes may tell a stranger the thoughts of an over-burdened heart, thoughts which would for ever remain hidden from the nearest and dearest, so Walter Lord told Peter, without himself realizing it, the story of his life's tragedy—the story of Anne Blakeslie.

“I never knew when she saw Winthrop Curwood first. Not that it matters.” The old voice was low and gentle. Throughout the pronoun “she” was spoken with such reverence as to suggest that it would have been written with a capital—as if, instead of Anne Blakeslie, a deity were its antecedent—“She must have known him pretty well when I saw them together for the first time. . . . I was going up to her house one day, soon after I got back from school, and. . . . They were standing just where a little wood road from up the mountain comes in to the sawmill road, about two miles west of the village. . . . They didn't see me, though I was in plain sight, a hundred yards away. . . . He was standing with his hat off—and a look on his face. . . . It was a fine face, too. . . . And just then he reached out, sort of uncertainly, and took her hand. . . . I thought I'd better go home, and come back to see Anne some other day—perhaps. But she caught sight of me before I'd gone

more than a few steps, and called to me. I went back, of course—and I saw him again, climbing up the steep road, it was hardly more than a trail, and feeling ahead of him with a long stick. It was then I saw, from the way he moved, that he was blind——”

“Blind!” echoed Peter, aghast! “Blind.”

“Yes,” said the old man, sadly. “He was stone blind. Anne told me about him, at once, with tears standing in her eyes. He had a little house over on the far side of the mountain, and lived there all alone. He had come there, she said, while he could still see a little, and built the place with some help from a man down in Job’s Corners, who still brought up his supplies. Nobody knew anything about him except it was easy to see, she said, that he was a gentleman, and educated. And indeed he was. I saw him, myself, several times after they—after they were married.”

He paused on that word, and the golden sun, freeing itself from the passing cloud, lit up the kind old face, with its pitiful, dyed hair, the quaintly youthful garments, and made of them a thing touching, tender, wistful in its appeal. He went on, almost immediately:

“He was a wonderful-looking man, tall and straight; and his voice—I don’t know how to describe it. It was clear and deep, like the sound of a big bell. . . . But I don’t think it was any of these things that most appealed to Anne Blakeslie.

It was his helplessness, his pitiful blindness. She talked to me about it quite often that fall. I knew by that time that there was no hope—I mean that I knew, by then, that she loved this stranger, and she said I was the only person she could talk freely to. Her father was a hard man, and she the only child.

. . . She told me, at last, that she was going to marry Winthrop Curwood whether he wanted her to or not. She was high-spirited in those days—headstrong, you might call it—and, when she'd made up her mind definitely that Curwood should not live alone, she—— You may not understand this part of the story, Mr. Clancy. Her father didn't, and cut her off completely—refused to see her, and left the farm and everything he had to a distant cousin, who lives there to-day—a selfish wretch!" For the first time there was bitterness in the old man's tone. Peter said, with quiet sympathy:

"I'll understand, you may be sure of that. Tell me what happened."

"Well, one night, just at dusk, Anne Blakeslie climbed this side of the mountain for the last time. She took some clothing with her, and a few other things. . . . She didn't tell me much, but I can imagine—knowing her. . . . She went in, quietly, and told him she had come to stay. He—he protested. He pointed out the sacrifice she was making. She overruled all his objections—as Anne Blakeslie would know how to do—and then——"

The room was growing dark. A big white moth

flew in through the open window and fluttered softly among the lilies.

“The next morning they went together down the far side of the mountain, and were married by Father O’Connell. . . . Anne sent me a letter and I went to see them. I was the only one, of all the people hereabouts, and I went only when Anne sent for me, which wasn’t often. Somehow, Curwood, in his quiet, dignified way, made me feel—well, anyway, I never went except when Anne needed me. But in those few times it seemed to me that they were managing very well. They seemed quite comfortable as long as Curwood lived. . . . He was an Englishman, I think. At least, he spoke differently from us. I’m quite sure he must have been English, though Anne never told me anything about him. He did not wish it, was all she said. If she was satisfied, it was enough for me.

“I found out, later, when he died, that he had only—what they call an annuity, which ended with his life. Anne had known it all along and had saved what she could, which wasn’t a great deal. The two little girls were growing up, and it took something to care for them. They came down here to the little old brick school house every day for several winters, and I used to see them often.”

Though he did not say so, Peter knew full well that Walter Lord had taken pains to keep an eye on the children of Anne Blakeslie.

“They were interesting children, very interesting.

All children and young people are, of course; but these two were more so than any I ever came in contact with. Rosamond was beautiful beyond anything I, or anybody, ever saw, I think. I used to delight in taking pictures of her. I could show you a dozen up in the gallery. And she was always more than glad to sit for me. She knew pretty well how she looked. Didn't need any one to tell her, and who could blame anything so lovely as that for knowing it was lovely? Might as well blame a water-lily that looks at itself all day in a pond. . . . But Anne, poor little Anne—she was always my favourite.”

Peter glanced up in surprise. That Anne Blake should have appealed, even as a child, to any one, least of all to this gentle, sweet old chap, was a decidedly new thought to him. Perhaps it was just because he was so gentle, Peter reminded himself, and because she was the daughter of Anne Blakeslie—Walter Lord went on, with a little laugh—

“She was always an odd little thing. I remember one time when Anne sent for me—her father was very ill; she had heard of it, and wanted me to take him a message. Well, I went up there, and little Anne, who must have been about five years old, happened to meet me, just at the edge of the woods, near the house. She was shy, and started to run, but I called her and told her my name and gave her some candy, one of those long peppermint sticks we used to like. She took it and thanked me very prettily, and then

she ran on ahead, and I heard her say to her mother, in such a funny little awed tone, 'Mother! Mr. God's coming to see you.'"

Peter laughed and the old man chuckled softly.

"She certainly was an odd little thing—Anne. She was shy, naturally, and was not as fond of coming up into the gallery as her sister was, because she was afraid that I would want to take her picture, a thing she absolutely refused to let me do. I did entice her into the gallery sometimes, with books and candy, and some of the other little things that children love. I had an idea that it might be nice to get a photograph of her for her mother. I had plenty of Rosamond, but had never been able to overcome Anne's prejudice against sitting for me."

"What a funny idea for a kid to have," said Peter, thoughtfully. "I know some boys would almost as soon go to a dentist as to a photographer, but I never knew a girl, of any age, who didn't love it."

"Well," said Walter Lord, slowly, "Anne had her reason, poor little thing. She was high-strung, and sensitive almost to the point of obsession about— But there"—he broke off—"she might have trusted me. I'd never have put the poor child—Anne Blakeslie's child—to shame. . . . And I finally got what I was after." Even though many years had passed, there was a little triumph in his voice at the recollection. "I got her to playing with a doll in the sitter's chair, and I caught her one day

in just the position I wanted. Would you like to see? I know just where——”

“I certainly would,” said Peter.

Walter Lord jumped quickly up from his chair, threw the end of a cigarette out of the window, and disappeared up a small back stairway which led directly from the room. Peter heard him walking about overhead for a moment. Presently he reappeared, with something in his hand.

He laid it down, and lighted a lamp on the table, for the room was now almost dark.

“There she is,” he said, leaning over Peter’s shoulder, and pointing to the little old photograph. “And, whatever chance has happened to her, I’ll wager that’s the only photograph in existence of Anne Curwood.”

CHAPTER XVIII

ROSAMOND'S SECRET

PETER took the yellowed card in his hands and looked at it long and eagerly. For nearly a month past he would have been ready to pay almost any price for a portrait of Anne Blake, and now, here in his hand, he held the thing he had been wishing for—and, for his purpose, it might as well have been a piece of blank pasteboard—or so he thought at the moment.

The child face of Anne Curwood was shown in profile, facing the left. The tell-tale mark, which had probably changed but little in the succeeding years, the birthmark by which Peter hoped to identify her without shadow of doubt, appeared not at all. This was the way in which Walter Lord had shielded a child's sensitiveness. He had, with careful purpose, selected a view which showed the little face unmarred.

That there was a hidden disfigurement Peter had no reasonable doubt, both because of what Lord had already said and because of his own previous knowledge, but he must make sure. He must force Lord to tell him.

“Why, she's a beautiful little kid,” Peter said,

abruptly. "I thought, from what you said, she must be as ugly as the dickens. Why in the world was she so funny about letting you——"

"Poor little thing! It wasn't funny," said the old man, compassionately. "If either you or I had the same reason, we'd have felt the same way."

"But I don't see——" Peter began.

"No, you don't," said Lord, quickly. "I took very good pains that no one should see it."

"See—what?" persisted Peter.

"Why," said the old man, hesitatingly, "the little thing was born with a dreadful mark on the other side of her face, the right side."

("I knew it was the right side," thought Peter, swiftly. "That would have been the side in shadow, when the cabman saw Anne Blake standing before her sister's dressing table. I told O'Malley it must be the right side." He was thinking this even while he listened attentively.)

"That's why I took her in profile," Lord was saying—"so it wouldn't show, you see. The child was painfully sensitive about it and so was her mother, though of course not to the same extent. I wanted them both to be pleased, and I knew Anne Blakeslie must hate to be reminded of—of—— Oh, Mr. Clancy, such a horrible experience. . . . I hate, even now, to think of it."

Peter did not say, "Don't think of it, then." He wanted to hear, to learn every detail. He did not want to miss even a remote chance. So he

looked eagerly, inquiringly, into the old man's face, but said nothing.

"It was awful, terrible," Walter Lord went on as Peter knew he must now that he was fully started. "It wasn't so very long before Anne and Rosamond were born. She was—she had gone into the woods to pick blackberries or something I think. . . . There was a sort of clearing behind some big rocks not so very far from the house. . . . And there—I learned it all much later—she came upon a vicious, half-witted tramp, who was harbouring up on the mountain. He was squatting on the ground, dressing a chicken he'd stolen, and she didn't see him until she was right beside him. . . . He looked at her—and leaped up. She was a woman, beautiful—alone, and, as he thought, far from help. He bent over, and crept toward her, with his hands all bloody. . . . She screamed—and—and he caught her by the throat——"

The old man lifted his clenched hands and pressed them, quivering, against his forehead. Peter sat in horrified silence.

"If she hadn't screamed"—Walter Lord went on, after a moment—"if she hadn't been able to fight, and keep on screaming—God"—Again he paused, but after a long, shuddering breath, continued—"Curwood was inside the house, but he heard her. He had almost a sixth sense of direction, and all his senses were preternaturally acute, but he was blind! Think of it! To be blind, and to hear

someone—someone you loved—calling—calling for help!

“He got there—just in time. The fiend heard him coming and made off through the woods. . . . Anne was ill, terribly ill, and for a long time it seemed as if she could not live. It was a fearful time for—for everyone who cared for her.

“A few days before her little twin babies were born, the body of the—of the wretch was found at the bottom of a cliff. There were black marks of fingers on his throat—but he was known to be a worthless scoundrel—and the coroner’s jury brought in a verdict of accidental death.”

There was a long silence, broken only by the call of an owl away off in the woods—“Who-o-o—Who——”

After a time Walter Lord went on, in a slightly altered tone:

“I don’t know how it was, but little Rosamond never showed the slightest effect of her mother’s fearful experience, while Anne, poor little Anne, not only will bear, as long as she lives, a terrible birth-mark, but her whole character seemed to be affected by it. Whether it was the shock to her mother’s entire nervous system, or whether it was because she was not like other children, I can’t tell, but she was painfully, almost morbidly, shy and retiring. She came down here to school only when she was forced to do so, and the rest of the time she spent with her father, whom she positively adored. I think the fact

that he was blind and could not see how badly she was disfigured may have had something to do with it, for on this point she was abnormally sensitive and self-conscious. I don't believe, strange as it may seem, that her father ever knew anything about it. There was no necessity, and I can't think any one would have been cruel enough to tell him. The few times I saw them together he showed no consciousness that there was anything amiss with his little favourite, Anne. He would stroke her smooth little face and call her his 'beautiful, little, dear girl.' In fact, so far as he could tell, there was no striking difference in the appearance of the two children, for in feature they were almost exactly alike, as you may be able to see from these photographs."

Peter studied them again, as they lay, side by side, in the warm glow of the lamp. It had not struck him before, but as he compared them, feature by feature, he could see that in childhood, at least, the two little twin sisters must have looked startlingly alike, though even at that time the expression of the two faces was strikingly dissimilar.

There was the same thick, rich, dark hair, the same smooth, broad brow, the same delicate modelling of feature, but in the case of Mary—(Rosamond, he corrected himself)—the eyes and mouth were laughing, careless, and gay, while Anne's were serious and quiet—almost tragic—a thing not good to see in one so young.

“All kinds of possibilities there,” thought Peter, with a slight shake of the head. “Plenty of intelligence and nervous force—a kind of courage, too, I should imagine, with a strong little chin like that. . . . The devil’s own lay-out for a girl, handicapped as she was——”

Walter Lord, looking at the portraits and not at Peter, did not notice his abstraction.

“Yes,” he said, “they did look a lot alike, in a way, but even at that, the resemblance was only physical, and they showed more and more difference as they grew up. Their father died when they were about fifteen, and after that her mother had more difficulty than ever in controlling Rosamond. I saw a good deal of them at that time, and though she talked little about it, I could see that she was worried. Even at that age, Rosamond was careless, reckless, and extravagant. She always longed for finery, and when I brought books for little Anne, I always took a bit of ribbon or some such foolishness to Rosamond. It was wonderful to see what the child could do with the few things at her disposal. She had a sense of dress and adornment that was really remarkable.”

(Peter remembered that he had read, somewhere, that Mary Blake was the most skilfully costumed woman on the stage.)

“Little Anne had it, too, in a different way. Her clothes were always quiet and pretty and suitable. Dress seemed to be a kind of instinct with both of

the girls, but Rosamond's taste was almost—almost theatrical.”

Peter nodded to himself.

“I suppose it was a desire for admiration,” Lord went on, in his gentle, kindly voice, “that was the cause of—of the trouble that came to poor little Rosamond.”

Peter pricked up his ears. Was he to learn something at last? Something of the secret, perhaps, that Mary Blake thought no one would ever know—the reason that she——

“What trouble?” asked Peter, aloud, carefully restraining his eagerness.

Walter Lord's chin was on his hand and his eyes were bent upon the two little pictures. He spoke slowly, sadly:

“It didn't happen until after their mother passed away. . . . I could always thank God for that. . . . The girls were eighteen then, well grown, tall and graceful, and Rosamond most beautiful—magnificent—though I always thought that Anne——”

Lord paused an instant and then caught up again the thread of his narrative.

“Well—no one knew exactly how it happened. On the mountain, beyond that valley over there”—he pointed through the window, where a full, bright moon lit hill and vale with tender radiance—“on the far side of the mountain there had sprung up a summer colony of city people. We saw them, once

in a while, riding through here on horseback—a gay lot of young people, rich and careless. . . .

“How Rosamond met—the man—Anne never knew. She loved her sister passionately, devotedly, but Rosamond never confided in her. All Anne knew was that Rosamond went off for long walks by herself. She'd be gone all day, and come home, laughing and happy, with a brilliant colour in her face and her eyes alight. . . . And then, one day, she did not come back. . . . Anne watched, in sleepless agony, all through the night, and in the morning she came down to me. . . .

“We never heard from Rosamond but once. . . . Only once, and that was the next day. Just one letter to Anne, which she never showed me. I don't know if even she knew the name of the man. . . . All she said to me was: ‘She's never coming back, Uncle Walter,’ and then she covered her poor face with her arm and laid her head against the wall. ‘She's not married to him,’ she sobbed, ‘and she says—oh, God!—she says she doesn't care. . . .’”

“So that was it,” thought Peter. “That was Mary Blake's secret. Good God! How shall I tell Morris? A young, pleasure-loving, untaught, unmoral creature. . . . And he thinks her perfect. . . . What was his phrase? ‘A wonder-woman’!”

Old Walter Lord talked on sadly, reminiscently, but for a long time Peter did not hear what he was saying. He was thinking—“What shall I tell Morris? How shall I tell Morris?”

CHAPTER XIX

IN THE OLD PHOTOGRAPH GALLERY

WHEN Peter awoke very early the next morning, though the problem was still the same, the form of his inner question had slightly changed.

“How much need I tell Morris?” he asked himself. “If Mary Blake never is found, why dig up the sad old sordid story? It must have happened ten years ago—and perhaps she’d redeemed herself—who can tell? And it’s a thankless job, chucking stones is, Pete. . . . If what O’Malley and I doped out turns out to be true, and Anne, in spite of the virtues old Lord attributes to her. . . . If Anne, for the sake of her clever sister’s money—or from jealousy of her perfect beauty——H’m’m’m.”

He broke off here to wonder how the sisters came together afterward. Lord evidently knew nothing about it. So far as Peter could learn he was quite unaware that they had ever met again.

After recovering from the shock of Lord’s disclosure in regard to Rosamond, Peter had, carefully and skilfully, questioned him. The talk lasted far into the night, but all he had found out was this:

Upon Rosamond’s disappearance from Hobart

Falls, Anne had retired, absolutely, within herself. All that winter she lived alone in the small house on the other side of the mountain and never came at all to the village. Lord had gone up to see her many times, and at last she confided to him that she had almost no money at all.

He didn't say it in so many words, but Peter gathered that the generous, kind old man had offered to share what little he had with her and had been refused.

"When summer came," he told Peter, "without saying anything to me, she went over and got work from the rich city people in Fennimore Park."

Peter understood that the old man was very angry when he found it out, but that it had had no effect on Anne's unyielding spirit. She continued to take washing and to do day's work for the summer people. There was nothing else to be done. She was too proud to take money she had not earned, and this seemed to be the only way in which she could make a livelihood.

And then, one day late in the fall, Lord had received a letter from her saying that she was going away as a sort of maid or companion to an old lady, a Mrs. Rutherford, who had a cottage in Fennimore Park. She told him that she hoped, before very long, to be able to send the money he had loaned her on her father's watch and an old seal ring. (Lord had been worried for fear Mr. Clancy might think he had exacted this security. Peter assured him that

he readily understood that it must have been forced upon him.)

“And did she send for them?” Peter had asked with interest.

It transpired that she had and that Lord had returned the watch and ring in Mrs. Rutherford’s care, to the Holland House in New York.

And that was the last he had ever heard of Anne Curwood. He had made a pilgrimage to Fennimore Park the next summer, only to find that Mrs. Rutherford had gone abroad and that no one knew anything about Anne. The following year he succeeded in seeing Mrs. Rutherford, who was obviously, from Lord’s tone, an awe-inspiring lady. She had dimly remembered that she had once had a maid named Anne Curwood, but the young woman was no longer in her employ and she could, unfortunately, give Mr. Lord no address.

Peter was going over all this in his mind as he bathed and dressed. He was in a somewhat despondent mood for one of his sanguine temperament, and rather wished he had not humoured Walter Lord’s absurd request that he should sit for his photograph before he left in the morning. To be sure, he had refused once, on the ground that his train left at nine-thirty, but when he saw how disappointed Lord was not to have this souvenir of what was, evidently, an event in the old man’s life, he hastily relented, and as a result, he was up and dressed at seven o’clock.

He had heard his host pottering about the kitchen

before he was up, and when he presently descended the old carpeted front stair, he found an ample and savoury breakfast awaiting him. It was rapidly, and by Walter Lord gleefully, dispatched.

“The light is great this morning,” the old enthusiast said, as he led the way up the back stairs, “and I’m going to make a fine picture of you, Mr. Clancy. It’s awfully good of you to be willing to humour an old codger like me. I hope you won’t mind the gallery being a bit dusty,” he added, opening a gray painted door. “I don’t have much incentive, these days, to keep it spick and span, and I never have allowed Miranda to tidy up here since the day she carefully dusted six wet negatives.” He laughed over his shoulder as he went into a closet for his plate holders.

Peter, left to his own devices for a moment, wandered about the room. It was an ordinary country photograph gallery, with the usual top and side lights, platform, screens, and chairs. The only odd thing about it was that the walls, from a chair rail at the bottom to well above the eye line, were completely covered with photographs. It was a big room, and there was not one inch of space wasted. It must have been the enthusiastic work of a lifetime, and Walter Lord was, obviously, a good workman for even the portraits which, judging by the costumes, dated far back, were not badly faded.

“This is some collection you’ve got here,” said Peter, admiringly, as Lord came back into the room. “Wish I had time to look it all over.”

Lord laid his plates down on a table near by, and smiling at the compliment, motioned Peter to a chair on the platform. Then he ducked under the black cloth of the camera, talking all the while:

“Yes, I’ve done a fairish amount of work in my time, Mr. Clancy, though a lot of it was gratis, as you may imagine. (A little more to the left, please.) I haven’t made a lot of money, but I’ve had a splendid time. (Chin up, just a little. Not quite so much—there, that’s fine. Couldn’t be better.) I’ll show you some things you may be interested in, in just a moment. Now, don’t move, *please*.”

He slipped out from under the black cloth, caught up and adjusted the plate holder with expert hands, and then stood beside the camera, with the bulb ready.

“Now imagine that you’ve just caught a two-pound trout, Mr. Clancy! That’s what I want! That’s fine, fine! Oh, that’s going to be splendid, Mr. Clancy,” he said, gleefully, as he manipulated the plates. “Now just once more to make sure. A little to the right—there—and another fish!”

Peter laughed aloud. The shutter clicked. The old man was delighted.

“I caught that laugh of yours, Mr. Clancy, and that was just what I wanted—to remember you by. It’s good to be young, and to laugh. I don’t believe you have a care in the world!”

Peter laughed inwardly, sardonically, at this. And all the while he was thinking of Donald Morris. How much need he be told?

“Come over here, and I’ll show you something pretty, Mr. Clancy.” Walter Lord, having disposed of his precious plates, was again at Peter’s side. “I think this is one of the most charming pictures I’ve ever made. See if you recognize it.”

He led the way to a corner of the room where some of the photographs were turning a little brown; evidently they had been placed there years ago. He pointed to a cabinet-size picture half way up the wall. Peter looked and saw, dressed in a fanciful costume of fluttering gauze, a delicate, slender child’s figure standing, fairy-like, beside the trunk of a great beech. The flicker of sun and leaf shadows was all about her, and her little oval face was alight with joy and mischief. The beauty of it caught Peter’s breath.

“Why, it’s Mar—Rosamond Curwood, isn’t it?” he exclaimed. “And, by George, I’ll say you’re some artist, Mr. Lord!”

“It is lovely, isn’t it?” said the old man, happily. “I remember how I enjoyed taking it. Not many regular photographers were doing outdoor backgrounds at that time, but I had nothing here”—he glanced scornfully at the stiffly painted old screens—“nothing that was suitable. And I did want to keep a memory of the way the child looked in that fairy dress. I saw her at the school in a little play, and persuaded her—not that there was any trouble about that—to sit for me. It was a curious thing how well Rosamond acted in all the little

entertainments they gave at the school. . . . At the same time, I don't think she was half so clever, in that way, as Anne, but of course Anne was so shy that she would never appear in public, and I imagine almost no one knew that she had any talent. I only found it out, myself, by accident."

Peter saw in this the old man's habitual defence of his favourite, a natural siding with "the under dog." To humour this kindly quality, he asked:

"How was that?"

"Why," said Walter Lord, reminiscently, "it started one day when I was going up to their house through the woods. I was walking along quietly, and suddenly I thought I heard someone talking, half singing, a little way to the left, behind a screen of young hemlock. The words, such as I could catch, sounded strangely familiar. My curiosity got the better of me, and I slipped quietly through the bushes and parted the hemlock sprays. There, in a tiny open glade, was little Anne, dancing lightly in the sunshine and half singing:

"If we shadows have offended,
Think but this, and all is mended——
That you have slumbered here,
While these visions did appear——

"You know, Mr. Clancy—the last part of 'Midsummer Night's Dream'."

Peter was not any too familiar with Shakespeare,

but he nodded in silent acquiescence, and the old man went on:

“I found out, after that, that she knew simply miles of Shakespeare. She used to recite for me, under strict pledge of secrecy, in the woods, on long, summer afternoons. You should have heard her, as little Arthur, in ‘King John,’ plead for her eyes—‘O, spare mine eyes, if for no use, but still to look on thee!’ Her voice was enough to break a body’s heart. . . . But, of course, she had no chance, poor child, with that dreadful mark on her face.”

“Was it such a terrible disfigurement?” asked Peter, eager to get an accurate description. “Where was it and how large?”

“It was just here”—Walter Lord placed his curved palm upon his lower jaw, with the fingers extending up on the cheek. “It was almost like the mark of a hand, a bloody hand——” The old man frowned and sadly shook his head. “Too bad, too bad. Wrecked the poor child’s life . . . seems terrible . . . such a little thing—but, for a girl——”

“Yes, too bad, too bad,” echoed Peter, absently, the while he made a mental note of the probable shape and position of the identifying mark by which he hoped at last to recognize Anne Blake. “Well,” he added, rousing himself and looking at his watch, “I’m afraid I ought to be going, Mr. Lord. How long will it take to get to the station?”

“Oh, not more than ten minutes,” answered the old man, dragging out his own watch and comparing

it with Peter's. "You've twenty minutes to spare. I want to write down your address so I can send you prints of the pictures I took of you just now. I'm pretty sure you'll like 'em."

He went over and began fumbling in his desk for something to write upon. Peter followed and stood beside him.

"Forty-seven East Thirty — Street." Peter supplied his private address, and as Lord seemed to be having some trouble in finding what he sought, Peter waited, glancing absently about.

Suddenly his eye was arrested by a picture on the wall—a man and a girl on horseback. Could he be mistaken? He stepped nearer. No, he was right. He had never seen the girl before, but the man, the man on the left of the photograph, was Donald Morris. There could be no possible doubt. But what was he doing here? How had it happened——

Suppressing an ejaculation, Peter turned to the old photographer. Making his voice perfectly casual, he asked:

"Who's the good-looking chap on horseback over here?"

Lord looked up, following Peter's pointing finger.

"Oh, that?" he said. "I don't know the man's name. The lady is a Miss Stone—lives over at Fennimore Park. She's quite a friend of mine. Rides through here two or three times a season, and is always having her picture taken with some man or other. You'll find several of 'em along there. . . ."

Now, where the dickens? Oh, here it is." He pulled, from a crowded pigeonhole, a small, dusty, black leather notebook, dragging a mass of letters and papers out with it. "Now, Mr. Clancy, give me the address again, if you don't mind——"

Peter, his mind full of conjectures, leaned over the old man as he sat at his desk, and absently repeated his address: "Forty-seven East Thirty —— Street, New York City." And as he did so, his eye lighted upon one of the letters which had fallen to the floor.

Automatically, he stooped to pick it up, and as he lifted it, inadvertently he caught the words:

" . . . money order, and if you will return my father's ring, which I value, and the——"

Peter's heart almost stopped beating as he looked at the writing. His brain was in a whirl. He must leave immediately, and he had no time to weigh problems of right and wrong. He only knew one thing. He must have this letter of Anne Curwood's—of Anne Blake's. He must have time to consider.

The old man's head was bent above his notebook. With a swift motion Peter, feeling like an unmitigated hound, slipped the letter into his pocket. "I'll make up some story—I'll return it later," he thought, confusedly. "In the meantime——"

"I'm afraid I've got to hustle to make the train, Mr. Lord," he said, aloud, grasping the old man's hand. "You've been awfully good to me, and I do appreciate it, though I may not show it much. I'll write to you, and I hope you won't forget me.

Don't come down. I'll just grab my bag and beat it. Thank you a thousand times for your hospitality, and if you ever come to New York, don't forget that you have my address. Good-bye. Good-bye"—and in the midst of Walter Lord's hearty farewells and invitations to come again, he was gone.

CHAPTER XX

PETER CLANCY CHANGES HIS PLANS—

AND again, as Peter made his swift way to the station, the question which had been hammering in his brain took another form—"How much can I keep from telling Morris? How much can I keep to myself till I can think things out? It's absurd, Pete! It can't be, and yet—if—if——" And again: "How much can I keep from telling Morris?"

The answer to the question which was uppermost in Peter's rapid thoughts was destined, within the next few minutes, to be influenced in a most unexpected manner. He had scarcely entered the little old smelly waiting room of the Hobart Falls station, when, at the sound of his footsteps on the bare boards, a man looked out of the little grated ticket-window, the same man who had replied to his inquiry as to telegrams on the previous evening.

"There's a wire here for you now, if your name's Clancy, Peter Clancy," the agent said, turning back to refer to a yellow sheet of paper which lay beside the telegraph instrument. "That was the name you said last night, wasn't it? It's just come in, not five minutes ago. Night letter. Sign here, please."

He slipped the telegram and a thumbed pad through

below the grating, watching Peter curiously the while. Evidently the residents of Hobart Falls were not used to receiving night letters.

Peter scrawled his name on the pad, and hastily catching up the telegram, he went swiftly over to the window. What had happened? What new complication——

The telegram was written out in the operator's none too legible hand. It was maddening, for, not very far away, Peter could hear his train, whistling for a crossing. And he wanted to get back to town—to talk to O'Malley—to think.

Slowly, perforce, he puzzled out the unpunctuated sentences:

Full story M. B. disappearance to-night's Earth devil to pay think F.J. must have spilled beans D.M. all broken up left for Fennimore Park private car with sister night train Fennimore Park near you report there for God's sake make him understand no leak this office

(Signed) O'MALLEY.

The train thundered into the station and out again, but Peter took no notice. His plans had undergone a complete change. The agent, who was also the expressman as well as the telegraph operator, was surprised to find the intending passenger still there though not so much so as he would have been if he, himself, had not received the queer telegram. He was somewhat prepared for the question with which the stranger greeted his reappearance.

“What’s the next train for Fennimore Park?” Peter asked, quickly.

“Ain’t no train for there on this line,” answered the agent, helpfully. “Ye have t’ go back to the junction and ketch the Mountain Express there. Ye should have taken number fifty-three down,” he jerked his head in the direction of the rapidly receding rumble.

Peter’s silence was more profane than any speech. Then a sudden thought struck him. He threw a withering glance at the indifferent agent, and jumped to the door opposite to the one on the platform. He was just in time to see a tired flivver strolling slowly down the dusty road.

“Josh!” he yelled, at the top of his voice. “Josh!”

His lungs were strong, and his intent was sincere. Slowly the old car came to a standstill and the driver, craning his long neck, looked back down the road.

“Ye want me?” he bellowed.

Peter answered with a peremptory wave of the hand. The creaking car turned in a cloud of dust, and came slowly back.

“How far is it to Fennimore Park from here?” Peter asked, as soon as it came within reasonable calling distance.

“Pretty clost to twenty mile,” said Josh, promptly. “Why?”

“Is the old boat good for it?” Peter eyed the poor old car with some disfavour.

“Ye betcha she is,” said Josh, enthusiastically. “I told ye, she’s the best car in town. Want I should take ye there? I’ll do it fer five.”

Peter wasted no more time. He jumped, bag and all, into the back seat. “Shoot!” was all he said.

He was silent for almost the entire way—thinking—thinking—thinking——

The old car bumped and skidded over the mountain roads, and groaned and laboured up the long, rough hills. Peter kept himself in by clinging to the iron braces of the top, but aside from these automatic efforts at self-preservation he was practically unconscious of the way they went.

A strange thought had come to him in Walter Lord’s old photograph studio. A thought so odd and bizarre that at first it seemed absolutely impossible and insane. And then he began piecing things together. Bit by bit, apparently unconnected scraps of information were fitted together, now this way and now that. Once, making sure that the driver was completely occupied with the difficulties of the winding road, Peter took from his pocket the letter he had appropriated. (“Stolen, dammit!” he thought, disgustedly. “Mine’s a hell of a job for a decent man. But if I could prove, even to myself——”) He looked long and wonderingly at the letter before he slipped it back into an inner pocket.

“Mary, apparently, took no clothes at all,” he thought, going back for the thousandth time over

the old ground, “and Anne took a big trunk. . . . Well, that would fit—either way. . . . The large sum of money, left at the bank, subject to Anne’s order as well as Mary’s. . . . Yes—either way. . . . But the blood on the scarf—and on the floor. . . . I don’t see—unless. . . . By George! I’ll bet——”

The driver heard his passenger slap his leg with a resounding thwack. He turned his head slightly. “Mosquito?” he threw over his shoulder. “Did ye git him?”

“No. Yes—I’m not sure,” said Peter, coming, confusedly, back to the present. “How far are we now from Fennimore Park? And do we pass through any town on the way?” he added, his mind reverting to immediate necessities.

“We’ll be there inside of twenty minutes,” Josh answered the questions in order, “and we pass through Tollenville about a mile this side. ’S quite a big place. Why?”

“Think I could get yesterday’s New York papers anywhere there?” asked Peter. “Must keep up with the times, you know.”

“Oh, sure ye can,” said Josh, easily. “Must have ’em at the Tollen House, I should think. I’d like t’ stop there, anyway,” and he drew the back of his hand, in a suggestive gesture, across his mouth.

“All right,” said Peter, with a comprehending grin. “If it’s that kind of a place I may get the paper I want. So don’t forget to stop.”

"I won't," said Josh, with evident sincerity, and Peter retired again into his thoughts.

It seemed to him not many minutes later when they pulled up in front of a big, ugly red brick hotel with many wooden porches and gay, striped awnings.

"Tollen House," remarked Josh, briefly, and disappeared around the corner of the building.

Peter entered the lobby and anxiously enquired for the *New York Evening Earth* of yesterday's date. One was found for him, much to his satisfaction. He gave the porter, who brought it to him, a generous tip, and dashed out to the poor old waiting "Lizzie," which looked more weary and woebegone than ever.

Josh was nowhere in sight, and while Peter waited he ran a quick and practised eye over the paper.

"No wonder Donald Morris was in the devil of a stew," he thought, as he absorbed the principal article on the front page, with its blatant headlines and its large half-tone picture of Mary Blake. "Wonder if he could think our office would be guilty of letting his name appear! Gee! that would be a rotten thing for a client. 'Absence first discovered by Donald Morris, son of Steven Morris, and heir to the Morris millions'," he read, disgustedly. "Dammit all! It's a beastly shame. I'll bet his house was besieged by reporters before the story had been on the street ten minutes. Nobody could have leaked but Jones, confound him! Bound to get some publicity for his leading lady, whether she liked it or not, and a lot for himself into the bargain. 'Frederick Jones,

Miss Blake's manager, interviewed,' and in pretty good-sized type, too. Oh, damn!"

At that moment Josh returned. Wiping his mouth with a soiled red handkerchief, he took his place at the wheel. "Some hooch!" he remarked, with a wise, sidelong wink, and the car started laboriously up the road.

Peter, still looking at the offending paper, rapidly formulated his defence as they crawled up the steep mountain side. The roadbed here was of red shale, smooth and well tended, a strong contrast to the back roads they had been traversing. Soon they came to a great rough stone gateway and a lodge. They were held up here, while the lodge keeper telephoned the Atterbury cottage, where, he said, Mr. Donald Morris was stopping.

"It's all right. You can go right up, sir," he said, returning after a moment. "Do you know where it is? Well, you take the first turn to the right after you pass the inn, and it's the last house before you come to the church. You can't miss it. Thank you, sir."

"Some style," grumbled Josh, as the car moved away. "Would ye think this was once a free country?" He addressed the world at large, and Peter did not trouble to answer. He had too much to think about even to notice the exquisite woodland park through which they were passing; the great old mossy trees, the broad red road, the ferns and wild flowers, the primitive forest, broken here and

there by wide velvet lawns and low, broad, picturesque cottages. He was the first, however, to realize that they had reached their journey's end.

"There's the church, Josh," he said, "and this will be the house. Drive in and wait a minute till I make sure."

He sprang up the two low steps almost before the old car had stopped, and in a second returned and slipped a bill and some jingling coins into Josh's outstretched hand. "More hooch," he explained the coins with a wink, and Josh trundled away with a large admiration of his "fare" in his leathery old heart.

The servant, from whom Peter had made his inquiries, again met him at the door as he crossed the porch.

"Mrs. Atterbury would like to see you before you go up to Mr. Morris, if you please, sir," he said in a soft, tired voice, and led the way through a living room which seemed endless to Peter, and out on to another wide veranda. "Mr. Clancy, 'm," he announced, in a tone which disclaimed all responsibility for so plebeian a name, and softly vanished, leaving Peter face to face with Mrs. Francis Atterbury.

It was an ill moment for poor Peter, judging by the lady's expression.

"Mr. Clancy," she said, motioning slightly to a chair near the one in which she was seated. "This is a most unfortunate circumstance. My brother is quite overcome. He's really ill, yet I had to drag

him up here, almost by force, last night. The reporters were simply besieging the house, and my brother was so nervously unstrung that I had to call in a doctor. I've seen it coming for a long time, and that terrible article in the paper yesterday was the last straw. You've seen it, I suppose?" Her eyes narrowed as she keenly regarded Peter, and there was a drawing together of her handsome eyebrows which boded ill for him if he could not assure her of his innocence in the matter.

"I had a wire from my partner early this morning," Peter replied, with the calm of conscious rectitude, "and I was able to get the paper at Tollenville on my way over. That was absolutely the first I knew that the story had leaked out. You must see, Mrs. Atterbury, from the tone of the entire article, that my office could not possibly have given it to the papers. A firm of detectives couldn't last long, if it was as leaky as that. I will admit," he added, candidly, "that I advised Mr. Morris some time ago that our best bet was to give out the story so as to get the help of the general public in tracing Miss Blake—and her sister. You sometimes get information that way that you can't get by private inquiry. We would have been able, through personal connection with the papers, to keep Mr. Morris's name entirely out of it. I urged it on him several times, but he couldn't see it that way, and I was forced to give it up. We are acting entirely in Mr. Morris's interests"—he said this gravely, and with a

dignity which was very convincing—"and my office would not go contrary to his wishes in any particular. I must ask you and Mr. Morris to believe this."

"Well," conceded Helena Atterbury, unbending slightly, "I suppose I must take your word for it, Mr. Clancy. My brother seems to have a great deal of confidence in you. But I can't think—I can't see how Mr. Jones could have done such a thing. I believe your partner told Mr. Morris that the story could only have come from him. Why, I've entertained him at my house. He accepted my hospitality, and——"

"Mrs. Atterbury," Peter interrupted, with a shake of his head, "I'm afraid you don't understand what lengths people will go to for the sake of advertising. They seem to lose all sense of decency sometimes. I knew it was a risk to let Frederick Jones in on the game, but there were certain things we had to know and he was bound, being her manager, to find out sooner or later, probably sooner than later, that she'd disappeared. I hope you can see that we had no choice."

Helena Atterbury, in spite of her annoyance at the contretemps, could not fail to be impressed by the ingenuous sincerity of the young detective's speech and manner. Her voice had lost much of its icy hauteur when she spoke again.

"Well, I won't detain you any longer, Mr. Clancy," she said, rising. "Mr. Morris is anxious to see you. He is in a very bad nervous condition, and I know

you will be careful.” Her natural, woman’s anxiety spoke in her voice and eyes, and her natural, woman’s curiosity prompted her to question: “Did you find out anything new yesterday? Can you give my brother any hope that——”

“I don’t know, any more than I did before, where Miss Blake is, Mrs. Atterbury,” he said, frankly. “But I did find out some things—some things that I hope may prove of value. It was only last night and this morning that I got hold of the information, and I haven’t had time really to think it out. But I will say this much to you, Mrs. Atterbury: for almost the first time since I took the case I have hope. I really feel that I have definite hope.”

His clear, bright blue Irish eyes looked straight into hers, and Helena Atterbury’s distaste and distrust melted slowly away.

“I pray, for my brother’s sake, that your hopes are well founded, Mr. Clancy,” she said. “Come. I’ll take you up to him.”

CHAPTER XXI

—AND ASKS A QUESTION

PETER found his client comfortably ensconced in a long, swinging couch on a wide porch on the second floor. He looked pale and worn and appeared nervously exhausted, but his tired eyes lighted a little as Peter came through the bedroom door.

Helena Atterbury tactfully left them alone at once, and Peter was glad to find that there was little difficulty in convincing Donald Morris that he and his staff were in no way responsible for the newspaper article which had caused so much pain and annoyance.

“I wouldn’t have had it leak out for the world,” said Donald, anxiously. “Mrs. Atterbury was furious about the reporters coming to the house, but I wouldn’t have minded that so much. What knocked me up completely was the thought of how it would affect Mary. Somehow, that just bowled me over, Clancy. I’m ashamed to say I went all to pieces. You see, her letter to me—well, I’m sure, no matter what happened, she wanted me to wait—to wait till I heard from her.”

“By the way,” said Peter, leaning suddenly forward in his low wicker chair, “that letter—have you

got it with you? or anywhere handy? I'd like to look at it again. There's something I want to make sure of——”

A quality in Peter's voice caused Morris to look up at him quickly.

“What!” he exclaimed. “Have you found out something new? Did you get hold of anything at Hobart Falls yesterday? It seems the most unlikely place in the world, and I haven't the least idea why you went there.”

“I did—and I didn't,” answered Peter, non-committally. “As I just told your sister, I don't know, any more than I did before, where Miss Blake has gone. But I did come across something—something that may help. *Have* you got the letter?”

Morris, regarding him with serious, puzzled eyes, put his hand into an inner pocket and drew out a leather case. Silently he opened it, extracted a letter and handed it to Peter, intently watching the face of the young detective.

Peter looked at the letter long and earnestly. He read it through carefully, from the folded page at the beginning to the end. Neither of them spoke. In the silence, a low murmur of voices came up to them from the porch beneath, a question in a servant's controlled tone, and a slightly louder answer from Mrs. Atterbury, but neither of the men heard or heeded.

Peter folded the letter and handed it back to Donald.

"You'd better keep it," he said, slowly. "I'll ask you for it again, later."

"Very well," said Donald, carefully replacing the letter. "And now, tell me, Clancy, for God's sake, what it was you discovered at Hobart Falls?"

"Well," said Peter, deliberately, "it wasn't so much, you may say. But there's one thing I know you will be interested to learn: I have found out positively what Miss Blake's own name really is."

"Her own name?" repeated Morris. "And in such an unlikely place?"

"Yes," answered Peter. "It does seem strange, but I can assure you that I'm correct. Her name is Curwood."

"Curwood," Donald echoed. "Curwood."

"Yes," said Peter. "That's the name. I verified it carefully, and you may be sure——" Suddenly he started violently, and his hand shot up in a warning gesture. He leaned close to Morris, and whispered in his ear: "What—— Who is that?"

A voice had come up to them from the porch below. What it said was commonplace to a degree. Donald could see no possible reason for the detective's evident excitement.

"Good morning, Helena, dear," the voice said. "I'm so glad you're here once more. I only just heard——"

There was the sound of a chair scraping on the tiled floor, and Mrs. Atterbury said something in a cordial tone.

“Who is it?” Peter repeated, insistently. “Who is that down there?”

“Why,” said Morris, looking at Peter in astonishment, “why, that must be Aunt Kate. Nobody else has a voice like that,” and he shook his head with a whimsical half smile. “What in the world——”

“Speak low,” said Peter, anxiously. “I don’t want to miss——”

Again the voice came up to them:

“Did Donald come up with you, Helena? I saw that thing in the paper, and somebody told me——”

Followed a low murmur in reply from Mrs. Atterbury.

“Who is it?” Peter asked again, excitement apparent in every line of his face. “A relative? What is her name? Her full name?”

“No, not a relative,” Donald answered, bewildered by Peter’s obvious agitation. “We’ve always called her that. Her name is Rutherford, Kate Rutherford.”

“Good God!” said Peter, starting to his feet. “Rutherford!” Under his breath he whispered to himself—“The voice! The voice over the wire. I’m sure, certain. There can be no mistake. I knew I’d recognize it if ever——”

“What is the matter, Clancy?” Donald had thrown aside the rug under which he had been lying, and had dropped his feet to the floor. “What do you know of——”

Peter interrupted sharply with:

"I want to meet her. I must meet her, Morris. Fix it for me. It's essential I should meet her at once. There's no time to explain. She may go—oh, for the love of—— Mr. Morris, I give you my word that I'm not crazy—and I must see and talk to Mrs. Rutherford!"

Staggered by the other's impetuosity, Donald got slowly to his feet.

"Wait, wait just a moment," he said, passing his hand over his forehead. "I don't understand, but of course—what shall I tell her?"

"Just say you heard her voice and came down to see her," whispered Peter. "Introduce me as a friend—if," he added, with an anxious, questioning look, "if you think you can go that far."

Morris looked him steadily in the eyes. Then he nodded slightly. Placing his hand on Peter's shoulder, he said, "I think I can go that far, Clancy. Come on."

Peter felt Morris's weight on his shoulder as they descended the stairs, but by the time they had reached the lower porch he was erect and master of himself.

Mrs. Atterbury started up in surprise as the two men came through the door, but her brother gave her a warning look, and she subsided into her chair without a word, though her eyes said plainly, "What in the world is Don bringing that detective here for?"

He ignored their puzzled question, and advanced with a smile to the visitor.

“Good to see you again, Aunt Kate,” he said, cordially, as he took her hand, and leaning over, kissed her on the cheek. “It was bully of you to come down so soon.”

Peter, who was directly behind him, did not see the visitor until Donald stepped back, and said:

“Will you let me present my friend, Mr. Peter Clancy—Mrs. Rutherford.”

Then Peter saw, seated in a high-backed Indian chair, as on a throne, a magnificent old lady whose impressive presence and mien were scarcely affected by the great weight of flesh which seemed to billow all about her.

She spoke to him at once, in a voice deep, clear, and resonant. “I’m glad to meet any friend of Donald’s,” was all she said, but her exquisite enunciation made of the commonplace sentence a thing of beauty.

Morris, observantly following Peter’s lead, sat down and joined in the quiet, ordinary, everyday conversation. The weather and everybody’s health came in for their stereotyped share. Peter, watching, was quite sure they had interrupted a more intimate talk between the two women. He guessed what its subject had been but knew that it would not be resumed in the presence of a stranger.

How was he, himself, to get an opportunity for a private conversation with Mrs. Rutherford, the necessity for which was uppermost in his thoughts?

And who was she, anyway? That she was a personage there could be no doubt. Peter racked his brains to remember if he had ever heard of her, to no purpose. She was of a previous generation, but a personality like that——

Unconsciously, Mrs. Rutherford proceeded to enlighten him. He was so preoccupied that he only caught his own name in the middle of a sentence:

“And Mr. Clancy, judging by his name and appearance,” she was saying, “ought to enjoy the story as much as I did. We’re both Irish, aren’t we, Mr. Clancy? As you may possibly know, my name was Rohan once upon a time, and——”

Rohan. Kate Rohan! Something clicked in Peter’s brain. Who, even of his comparative youth, had not heard of the old Athenæum Company, and of Kate Rohan, its planet among stars? So! That accounted for——much——the gracious presence, the wonderful voice——and many, many things besides, Peter thought.

He missed, almost completely, the amusing Irish story, told with a delicate, subtle brogue and a perfect inflection, but he heard just enough to join spontaneously in the laugh which irresistibly followed.

At the end of the story Mrs. Rutherford rose majestically, and like a great ship getting under way, started toward the door.

“I must be going, Helena,” she said, holding out her still beautiful hand. “I’m coming to see you and Don very soon again. Take care of yourself,

Don, and,” with a little quick shake of the head as she put her hand in his, “don’t worry about things, my dear. There’s nothing really worth wasting a lot of expensive worry upon.”

“I’ll see you to your car, Aunt Kate,” said Morris, placing his hand under her elbow.

She turned on him at that, and drew herself up with a little laugh. “I’d have you know, Donald, that I walked down here and intend to walk back,” she said, proudly.

“But, Aunt Kate!”

“Yes, my dear. The doctor says that if I don’t take some gentle exercise I’ll spoil my figure” (she pronounced it “figgah”), “to say nothing of having another heart attack. And he calls walking up the mountain ‘gentle exercise’! To be sure, I take it slowly, but whu-u-u——!” She drew a long breath and let it go in a tragic sigh, but her eyes were full of an inextinguishable humour.

“Are you going to be long here, Mr. Clancy?” she asked, turning to say “good-bye” to Peter, who stood close beside her.

“I don’t quite know,” replied Peter, quietly. “It will depend a good deal on circumstances. I ought to go back to town this afternoon, but I haven’t been around the—the Park much yet, and I promised myself I’d see something of it—only Don”—(he referred thus familiarly to his host without the flicker of an eyelash)—“you see, Don doesn’t feel quite up to going about with me, and——”

Quick as a flash Donald Morris intuitively caught Peter's intention. He did not know what the reason might be, but he grasped the fact that there was some unknown necessity for Clancy to see Mrs. Rutherford alone. So completely had the young detective won his confidence that this was enough for him.

"I do feel a bit seedy, Aunt Kate, and that's a fact," he said, promptly, "and Peter's just crazy to stretch those long legs of his. Take pity on him, there's a dear, and let him go along with you." Again he ignored the questioning, perplexed glance of his sister, who stood just behind Mrs. Rutherford. "The road up to Mrs. Rutherford's cottage is the loveliest thing in the park, Peter. When you've seen that, you'll agree with me that it's one of the most paintable bits in America."

"Are you a painter, Mr. Clancy?" Mrs. Rutherford asked, a few moments later as they started up the curving road, Peter accommodating his long stride to her stately, ponderous step. "I should hardly have thought——"

"I don't look much like one, do I?" Peter laughed. "Well, frankly, I don't consider myself one, but I'm very fond of nature—and art. It's one of the chief regrets of my life, Mrs. Rutherford, that I never saw you act."

She gave him a quick, almost youthful glance, and smiled. "I think you could hardly have been born when I left the stage, Mr. Clancy. That was over thirty years ago."

“But why, Mrs. Rutherford!” exclaimed Peter, tragically, “why did you leave the stage before I was born?”

She threw back her white head with a hearty, infectious laugh, and pausing in her slow ascent, she turned to him, making a broad, sweeping gesture with both hands.

“The answer is before you,” she said. “It was this infernal—I may say infernal to you, Mr. Clancy, may I not?—Well, then, it was this infernal flesh that came upon me like a thief in the night, and nothing I could do would stop it—so I had to stop—to give up my career”—there was bitterness in the beautiful voice now—“all on account of—oh, Mr. Clancy, who could stand a fat ‘Portia’! Thank God, I had sense enough to stop when I did. At least there are no grotesque memories of Kate Rohan.”

Up to this point in the conversation they had passed several houses and quite a number of people, to whom Mrs. Rutherford had bowed, graciously. Now the road before them lay, for a long way, fairly level and devoid of any sign of life. Unbroken ranks of tall trees threw their leafy shadows across the red shale of the road, and the soft whispering of the wind only served to accentuate the sense of solitude.

In another mood, Peter would have been sensible of the wonderful beauty of the place, but now he saw nothing in it but an opportunity, the opportunity which he must not miss.

Just ahead, in the shadow of a big pine, he saw a low, flat ledge of rock, lichen covered on its face and strewn above with a generous cushion of soft pine needles.

"You're tired, Mrs. Rutherford," he said, gravely. "Let's rest a minute over there."

She assented, with a whimsical nod, and allowed Peter to place her comfortably upon the rock. Peter remained standing just in front of her and regarded her in silence for a moment. There was a seriousness in his pleasant, homely face that caught her attention.

"What is it, Mr. Clancy?" she asked, with a hint of perplexity in her deep voice. "Why do you look at me as if—why, as if you wanted to ask me a question and didn't quite know what to say——"

"That's just it, Mrs. Rutherford," said Peter, eagerly. "That's just my trouble. There's something I want to know—something I must know——"

"And you think I can tell you?" she asked, wonderingly.

"I *know* you can tell me, Mrs. Rutherford—if you will."

She gazed up at him in sheer bewilderment. "I can't think what it can be," she said, conscious of the gravity of the young face before her, "and I won't promise to answer. But I'm curious to know. Ask your question, Mr. Clancy."

Peter bent his head and said, slowly, with pauses between the words:

“Will you tell me, Mrs. Rutherford, why—on Monday, the twenty-ninth of this May—from a pay booth in the Vanderbilt Hotel—you called Mary Blake’s apartment—and asked to speak to her sister, Anne?”

CHAPTER XXII

“ON MONDAY, THE TWENTY-NINTH OF MAY——”

A SLOW flush spread over the face of Kate Rutherford, mounting to her snow-white hair. Her eyes never left Peter's.

“On Monday, the twenty-ninth of May, from the Vanderbilt Hotel,” she repeated, slowly. “Yes, I did call—I did call her apartment, one day, about that time. Well”—a slight pause—“well, what of it? What of it, Mr. Clancy?”

“Don't you know—why, you must know from yesterday's paper, Mrs. Rutherford, that it was on Sunday, the twenty-eighth, that Mary Blake disappeared.”

“And you think”—she studied his face intently—“you think I may know where she's gone?”

“It would seem on the cards, perhaps.”

“Well, I don't.” She threw out her clenched hands and looked up at him. There was deep concern in her eyes. “I wish to God I did.”

Was she acting? Peter thought. And if so, why? Aloud he said:

“How was it that you happened to call her on that particular day, Mrs. Rutherford? And why did you cut off so suddenly when——”

“It was you—it was you who answered the call!” she exclaimed, a little light breaking in upon her. “What have you to do with this affair, Mr. Clancy? Why should I answer your questions? I don’t see——”

“You’re a friend of Donald Morris’s, an old and intimate friend,” said Peter, gravely. “You must be affected, deeply affected, I should think, by the sight of his unhappiness.”

“Yes,” she said at once. “Yes—and I didn’t know—I didn’t realize completely until this morning. But,” she broke off, and cast a keen glance at Peter, “forgive me, Mr. Clancy, but I don’t see what concern it can be of yours. I know most of Donald’s friends—and I never saw you before.”

“Yet I think I can truly say that I am a friend to Donald Morris,” said Peter with evident sincerity. “And, aside from that, Mrs. Rutherford, I’m a professional detective. I——”

“Clancy—Peter Clancy,” she exclaimed, quickly. “I thought I’d heard that name! Why, you’re the man Dick Schuyler told me about, several years ago.”

Peter nodded. “Yes, Mrs. Rutherford, and it was Mr. Schuyler who recommended me to Donald Morris. They both trust me, I think I can safely say. Won’t you trust me, too, Mrs. Rutherford?”

She looked at him for a long time in silence. Then she said:

“Yes, I think so. . . . I think, perhaps, I must. . . . It’s a terrible responsibility I have

upon me. I didn't realize how serious it was until today. . . . And now, I don't know. . . . I can't be sure what I ought to do. But let me see. Ask your questions, Mr. Clancy, and I'll see if I can answer them. What is it you want to know?"

"I've already asked one question that you haven't answered, Mrs. Rutherford," Peter said with a little smile. "Perhaps you don't realize that you haven't."

"No," she said, her straight black eyebrows drawn together in a thoughtful frown. "What was the question?"

"I asked you how you happened to call Miss Blake's apartment on the day after she disappeared?"

"Oh, yes. I remember, you did ask me that. Well," she spoke slowly, "it was because of a letter I'd just received from her. It had just come in, and I got it at the hotel desk when I turned in my key. I was so worried about it that I went immediately to a booth and called her up."

"Yes, but what was in the letter?" asked Peter, eagerly. "Did she say where she was going, or why?"

"That was what puzzled, worried me," said Mrs. Rutherford, frowning still more. "It was a—a sort of wild letter. I couldn't understand it. She said she was going away. That she might never come back. . . . It sounded desperate. . . . She thanked me for all I had been to her. Asked me to forgive her. . . . Not that I had anything to forgive. The whole thing was my fault, if there was a fault." She paused, and added, "And that was

all, Mr. Clancy. There was nothing else in the letter. I give you my word, that was all.”

Disappointment was written large on Peter’s face.

Kate Rutherford went on: “I thought that possibly she might not have gone, so I called her apartment at once. I wanted to see her, to dissuade her, if possible. Her career . . . it seemed a shame—a terrible waste. I couldn’t understand why, when she had reached the height we all crave, she should—— And then I found she wasn’t there. That there were strangers in the apartment. I couldn’t imagine why. I was frightened, and rang off. I knew it would be no use to go down there. She had said definitely, in her letter, that she was going away at once. It was only on a bare chance that I called up——”

“I—see,” said Peter, slowly. He thought in silence for a moment. Then he dropped down upon the rock, bringing his face on a level with the clever, mobile face of old “Kate Rohan.”

“You said, a few minutes ago——” he hesitated—“I think you admitted, Mrs. Rutherford, that you felt concerned for Donald Morris.”

“Yes,” she said, quickly. “I had no idea, until I read that article in the paper last night—and saw Donald this morning—I knew, of course, that he was interested in Mary Blake. He made no secret of it. But Don has had a great many women friends, and he had the artist’s enthusiastic way of speaking of them—I didn’t realize that this was really serious.”

“But you do realize it now?”

“Yes,” she replied, sadly. “Yes. I think there can be no doubt. The poor boy——”

“Mrs. Rutherford,” Peter said, leaning forward and watching her face, “do you know of a reason why Donald Morris should not marry Miss Blake?”

There was a long silence. The majestic old lady leaned slightly forward, her tightly clasped hands resting on her ample knees. Her white head was bent, her eyes fixed on the ground. After what seemed to Peter a long time, she said:

“I—I think she would have—must have felt—that there was a reason.”

“And do you feel that it was a reason, Mrs. Rutherford? A sufficient reason?”

“I”—she raised her head, and threw out her hands in an expressive gesture—“I don’t know. I don’t know how I would have felt, Mr. Clancy. Knowing Donald as I do—no, I don’t know how I would have felt,” she repeated, disconsolately.

“Will you tell me the reason, Mrs. Rutherford?” said Peter, with deep seriousness in his tone. “I know a good deal. But I need to know more. I can’t form a definite plan until I’m sure. I’ve made some guesses—just to-day and yesterday—that have sent me off on a new tack. If what I’ve suddenly come to believe turns out to be true, I think there’s a chance, possibly a remote chance, of finding—of finding Miss Blake.”

“You think—you think there is?” There was an eager light in the expressive old eyes.

“I think there may be,” said Peter, evasively. “But I can do nothing without your help, Mrs. Rutherford. That’s my trouble. I must know the whole story, as I am sure that you, and you only, can tell it. All I am certain of, at the present time, is that Rosamond and Anne Curwood (whom I first heard of as Mary and Anne Blake) were the twin daughters of a man called Winthrop Curwood, who lived somewhere up in the mountains, between here and Hobart Falls.”

“Winthrop Curwood! You know, then, of Winthrop Curwood?” exclaimed Mrs. Rutherford, sitting up straight, and looking at Peter in surprise.

“I know that he was the father, and that he was blind,” said Peter.

“Yes, blind,” sighed Mrs. Rutherford. “Poor Win!”

“You knew him, then?” said Peter, quick to note the familiar use of the name.

“Oh, yes. I knew Win Curwood well. Very well, indeed,” said Mrs. Rutherford, sadly. “You’re too young to remember, but he was leading man at the Athenæum and I played opposite to him for two seasons.”

“Ah, I—see,” said Peter. “An actor. That explains—but go on, Mrs. Rutherford. Tell me about him. How he came to be here, in this out-of-the-way part of the country—who he was—everything. He was an Englishman, wasn’t he?”

“Yes, and well known in England. Arthur Quinn

saw him play in London and made him a big offer to come over here. He joined the company while it was still at its best, and he was a great addition. A wonderful actor, and handsome almost beyond belief. He was younger than I by a number of years but we soon became great friends. I was jealous of him, of course," with raised eyebrows and a whimsical smile, "but not so much as I might have been, perhaps. He was very generous and tactful, and after all, at that time, I didn't have much need to fear a rival in popularity." There was an expression in the great, dark eyes, half sad, half amused at the recollection.

"He was with us only two seasons," she continued. "I remember it was in the middle of the second winter that I began to notice that he wasn't quite himself. He hadn't quite the same certainty of movement, and once, during performance, when he stumbled against a low table and overturned it, I felt sure that he had been drinking. I said nothing at the time, but afterward I spoke to him—and he told me. He was going blind! Think of it, Mr. Clancy. Going blind, with no hope! . . . I don't think he confided in any one but me until the very end. He managed to get through the season—it would have left Arthur Quinn and the company in an awful hole if he hadn't, and with my help—I played up to him and helped him as well as I was able—he saw it through. . . . And then, simply disappeared. He did tell Arthur Quinn (the manager, you know) why he would not

be able to play again. . . . And that was the last any of us ever saw, and the last for a great many years that I ever heard, of Winthrop Curwood.”

The deep tones ceased, and Peter saw that there was a mist in the fine old eyes. After a moment he said, gently:

“And then, after many years, you met Anne Curwood.”

She roused herself at that and looked at Peter.

“Yes,” she said, slowly. “I don’t know how you found that out—but it doesn’t matter. Yes, I saw Anne Curwood, and curiously enough, too, it was at Helena Atterbury’s house that I saw her first.”

Peter started in surprise. “At Mrs. Atterbury’s house!” he exclaimed. “Why, then, Morris must have seen her—must have seen Anne Blake!”

Mrs. Rutherford shook her head. “I don’t know whether he ever saw her, or if he did, whether he noticed her or would have given her a thought if he had. She was doing menial work—Win Curwood’s daughter: I can hardly bear to think of it. . . . And, too, she was painfully shy and self-conscious.”

“On account of that birthmark,” Peter interjected.

Mrs. Rutherford gave him a quick look, but went on at once, as if he had not spoken—“You see, she appeared to be only a servant, after all. She came in to do cleaning by the day. There was a great scarcity of help here that year and we all had to manage as well as we could. That was how I came

to speak with her. I was telling Helena about a lot of trouble I was having with the servants, and she said she thought I might be able to get Anne Curwood for at least one day a week. At the moment I thought nothing of the name, but when I saw her and heard her speak—well, I became interested and engaged her at once for two days a week. After a time, when she became used to me and my ways, I asked her, point blank, about her father—and established, to my own satisfaction, that she was, really, the daughter of my old friend, Win Curwood.”

“Did she tell you, at that time, about her sister, Rosamond?” asked Peter.

“No, it was later, much later, that I learned about the sister,” she answered, quietly.

“You found her after you’d taken Anne to New York as your companion?”

Mrs. Rutherford slowly turned her head, and looked long into Peter’s eyes. Then Peter did a curious thing. They were all alone, in the deep solitude of the leafy woods. There was no one, apparently, within miles of them, certainly no one within earshot, but Peter leaned forward, and with his keen eyes fixed on Kate Rutherford’s face, he whispered, just above his breath, one sentence—only one—but the effect was electrical.

She started forward and grasped his arm with clutching fingers. Her face was white.

“How—how did you guess?” she asked, breathlessly.

CHAPTER XXIII

A MIDNIGHT ERRAND

DONALD MORRIS paced nervously back and forth, back and forth, upon the wide, ground-floor veranda of his sister's house. He could look out along the road up which Clancy had gone, hours before, with Mrs. Rutherford.

As the slow minutes dragged themselves away, his impatience mounted, but he kept himself in hand. Clancy knew his business—of that he was convinced—but what possible connection it could have with Mrs. Rutherford he was at a loss to determine.

The luncheon hour had come and gone, and it was after three o'clock when Donald, eagerly watching, saw Clancy make the turn which brought him into sight, and saw him coming at a run down the sloping road.

“What has happened, Clancy?” Donald cried, impetuously, as they came close. “Where have you been all these hours?”

Peter's face was red with hurry and excitement.

“I—I can't stop to explain,” he panted. “I've only just time to make the train. I must be in New York to-night.” He caught Donald's arm. “Is there a taxi I can get? The train leaves Tollenville

in fifteen minutes. There's only barely time. Oh, Mr. Morris, for the love of God, don't stare at me like that. Tell me how to get a taxi. Quick!"

Peter's excitement communicated itself to Morris. He was bewildered, astonished. He longed intensely to ask the questions for which there was no time, but Peter's insistence was overpowering.

"I'll get a car for you here," he said, swiftly. "Saunders will make the train if it's a possibility. Your bag's still on the porch. Get it, while I——"

He dashed across the lawn and around the corner of the house. In a moment, Peter heard the thin buzz of a starter, followed instantly by the heavy, rhythmic hum as the engine picked up, and in a few seconds more a big car rolled around the corner of the house.

Donald Morris was standing on the running board. He dropped off as the car slowed down, and Peter, bag in hand, jumped into the seat beside the chauffeur.

"Give her gas, Saunders," cried Morris. "You haven't a minute to spare. Good-bye, Clancy! For God's sake write or wire me."

"I'll let you know! I'll let you know the minute——" Peter's voice was drowned by the roar of the engine as the car swung away.

Down the broad road and through the great park gate the big car honked and whirred. Past picturesque artists' cottages and white-painted farmhouses it fled, and then, with slightly slackened pace, it

rolled between ugly ranks of mountain boarding houses, down to the busy, noisy little station, where the train stood, panting to be gone.

It was already in motion when Peter leaped upon the step, breathless, without a ticket, but thanking his lucky stars that he was in time.

The train was crowded, and Peter had to wedge himself in beside a fat, jewelled lady, who ate frequently and copiously from greasy paper packages all the way to the junction, but Peter did not even notice the discomfort, so occupied was he with his own thoughts.

They were briefly broken in upon when the conductor demanded a ticket, but after Peter had paid for one, and ascertained that he would have time to send a telegram from the junction, he relapsed again into depths of intricate speculation.

At the junction he sent a telegram to O'Malley:

Made peace with D. M. Returning to-night. May have to leave again at once. Will call up if time.

PETE.

He had considered telegraphing Morris from the same place, but had decided against it.

"I only have a hunch that I know where to look," he thought. "Better not raise hopes till I'm sure. It's a damn shame to keep him in suspense, but I don't see any other way. . . . No, I'll let it ride as is for the present."

The afternoon waned, the sun went down in a mass

of soft clouds, and night came stealing on. The train was badly lighted, but Peter did not mind. He had no wish to read. He had plenty to occupy his mind, and it did not matter to him that the train was not due until after ten o'clock. What he had to do in town would better be done late at night.

"Just so I get there before midnight," thought Peter, glancing, absently, at his watch—"Ninety-five—Nine!— Why, we must be——"

He had changed cars at the junction and had been able there to get a window seat. It had become cold and damp after sunset, and he had closed the window. Now he made a shadow, with his hand, upon the glass, and looked out. He could see nothing; not a light or other sign of human habitation, and suddenly he realized that the train was running very slowly.

"I wonder what's up?" he thought, slightly troubled but not yet anxious. "Guess I'll see if I can find out."

He stepped cautiously over the feet of an elderly man who was slumbering noisily in the other half of the seat, made his way down the dull and smoky aisle, and gained the platform. Stepping down one step, he clung to the hand rail and leaned far out.

Fog. Fog everywhere, thick and gray. The lights from the coaches fell on it as on an opaque veil of floating gauze. Peter, cursing inwardly, went forward into the smoking car. Here he found men hanging out of open windows, looking down the track, and exchanging speculations. Just then the

conductor came through, a lantern swinging by his side.

“What’s up?” said Peter, addressing him anxiously.

“Little foggy,” said the conductor, passing rapidly forward.

“Oh, he won’t tell you nothing,” said a man in the seat near which Peter was standing. “They’re always mum as an oyster when there’s any trouble. They say there’s a wreck ahead.”

“Oh, my God!” ejaculated Peter, in a tone which was half profanity, half prayer.

He looked again at his watch. They were due in five minutes now, but were still, obviously, far from their destination.

“The doors will be closed at twelve o’clock,” thought Peter, “and if I’m too late——”

Just then the train came to a grinding stop.

Peter hurried to the door and down the steps. He paused on the bottom one and, hanging on to the hand rail, swung out so that he could see down the line.

Ahead of the engine a red lantern bobbed along beside the track, close to the ground. Still farther ahead another red light, apparently suspended in mid air, winked through the mist. He could hear raised voices in the smoking car behind him, and several men came out on the platform, talking excitedly. Minutes passed and then, to Peter’s infinite satisfaction, in a breath, the light against the foggy sky changed from red to green.

“Thank God,” said Peter, as, with the successive jerk of couplings, the train moved slowly ahead.

Peter regained his seat in an anxious frame of mind. He had reached a point in his intricate problem where his impatient spirit could brook no further delay. The train did not again come to a complete standstill, but its progress through the fog was agonizingly slow. Many times he looked at his watch, many times he shaded the glass of the window to peer outside. The fog had changed to heavy mist, and it became more and more difficult to form any idea as to where they were.

And then, when it seemed as if time had ceased, and that a lost train was wandering wearily through the fogs of the ages, a big arc light flashed through the window—another, and another. Lighted windows were all about. The train roared and rumbled into a cut, and Peter, with a sigh of relief, realized that he was near his journey’s end.

He was the first person to alight from the train when it clanked and hissed into the station. He stood on the forward deck of the ferry boat, and impatiently watched the slowly nearing lights of the great, dim city, wherein all his hopes were centred. He was the first passenger to reach the rough block pavement of its streets, and in a moment he was whirling through them as fast as, and perhaps faster than, the traffic laws permit.

He dismissed his cab at a dark corner of Washington Square, and once more, a little before midnight,

in a dripping mist, Peter crept along the south side of Waverly Place.

His soft whistle, twice repeated, brought the faithful Rawlins from the shelter of a doorway.

“Is it yourself, back again so soon, Mr. Clancy?” he asked, superfluously. “And have you come to tell me that I can go home and to bed this cheerful night, please God?”

Peter ignored the question.

“I’m in a hurry, Rawlins,” he said, quickly. “Is the coast clear? I want to go up to the apartment again.”

“You can chase yourself right along then,” said Rawlins, promptly. “I seen the dago go out half an hour ago, and he hasn’t come back yet. If you hustle——”

Peter did not wait to hear more. He slipped across through the mist and up the worn brown steps. He found the vestibule door open. The inner door was closed but not locked. He was in time.

Softly, soundlessly, he ascended the dim stairs, one flight, two flights, three. Again he inserted his duplicate key in the lock, as he had two nights before—only two nights, but what a difference there was in the feeling with which he listened to the soft click of the lock as the bolt threw back. Then it had been a forlorn hope. Now——

He closed the door softly, and went without hesitation into the living room, in the front, setting down his handbag just inside the door. Again he pulled

down the shades at the three big windows, but this time there was no uncertainty in the movements which followed.

Flashlight in hand, he went quickly over to the desk and turned on the small electric lamp. Then, slipping the flash into his pocket, he immediately crossed the room and took down with care the pile of magazines which were in the corner of the top book-shelf.

He carried them over to the desk, and in the light of the candle lamp went through them, one by one. The pages passed swiftly through his fingers with a soft, fluttering noise which sounded loud in the stillness, but Peter did not hear it, so intent was he upon his odd quest.

He looked like a student, as he sat there at midnight, with bent head, poring over the pile of magazines, but he read nothing. His swift fingers turned the pages, one by one, without pause, until he came to a place where an article had been cut away. Then he stopped, drew out a little leather book from his pocket, and made an entry—the name and date of the magazine and the number of the page. He did this with each magazine in turn, working methodically down through the pile until all were finished.

“I may be a damfool,” he said to himself, with a tired sigh as he rose from his cramped position, and lifting the mass of magazines, replaced them on the shelf. “If I am, I am. That’s all. But it’s a bet, a good bet, Pete. Even that wise old Mrs. Rutherford

thought so—and we're not passing any of 'em up. . . . Now, let's see. There's one thing more—may not be any use, but it's better to get the whole dope now I'm on the spot. It was the *Planet*. I remember that, and the date was—no, I'm not exactly sure—the twenty-fourth, or the twenty-fifth—and I've no idea what page. Better make sure——”

Peter never knew exactly why he turned out the light in the living room then. Some habitual instinct of caution, perhaps. At any rate, he did turn it out, and guided his steps by his flashlight only as he made his way down the long, narrow hall to the storeroom.

Here he proceeded again, swiftly, unhesitatingly. He lit the gas, and dropped to his knees beside the big trunk. There was a faint jingle as he selected a key from the big bunch which he took from his pocket and inserted it in the lock, a click as the bolt was released. There was not a sound when he carefully raised the lid and folded back the garments on top, until he came to a bundle wrapped in newspaper.

This he lifted out and looked again at the wrapping. “The *Planet*, May twenty-fifth—and the page—the fourth page,” he muttered. “This, probably, has nothing to do with the case. There'd be likely to be a notice of the closing of 'Dark Roads' that she'd have wanted to keep—but, anyway, now I've got the whole bag of tricks—and that's all I can do to-night, thank Heaven. Gee, but I'm tired!” He pushed his hand up through his hair, tilting his hat,

which he had not removed, to an acute angle, and again he said, with feeling, "Thank Heaven, I'm through!"

Then he replaced the package and closed and locked the trunk. He had just turned the key, and was still upon his knees, when his whole body suddenly stiffened. With a spring, he was upon his feet, and with one swift, soundless motion, he had turned out the light. Then he waited, every muscle tense, listening.

In the solid darkness, far away at the other end of the hall, he heard the unmistakable sound of a key cautiously turned in a lock.

CHAPTER XXIV

“HANDS UP!”

THERE was silence, absolute silence, and darkness impenetrable. Peter waited, breathless, listening, the one available sense sharpened to preternatural acuteness.

Then faintly, faintly he heard the outer door move on its hinges, heard a tiny click as it closed again, was aware of a little gleam of light stealing along the floor, and of stealthy footsteps, coming nearer and nearer, as the light perceptibly increased.

Inch by inch, without a sound, Peter crept behind the storeroom door. His right hand closed firmly on the edge and he drew it toward him, widening the crack between the door and the jamb sufficiently to be able to see the midnight intruder, if he—or she—came that far along the hall.

Softly the cautious, secret footsteps continued their advance. The light was a distinct ray now, and Peter drew back into the shadow, keeping his eyes in a line with the narrow aperture. Then the light became a small, blinding circle, and as it flashed away Peter caught a dim glimpse of the figure behind it. The reflected light from the wall brought out the whites of the eyes and, less distinctly, the features of the face.

Peter gave a little inward gasp of satisfaction. His right hand slipped swiftly back, with an accustomed gesture, and when he brought it forward again it was not empty. Silent and quick as a cat, he slid around the edge of the door. Three long, noiseless steps—a ring of cold steel pressed against a sweating neck, and:

“Hands up, Angelo!”

The voice was low and stern, filled with icy menace.

There was a crash and a sobbing oath. Two trembling hands shot up into the air and remained there, rigid, protesting mutely against any need for violence.

“Keep ’em up, and turn around,” said Peter, in a fierce whisper, pulling out his own strong flashlight to take the place of Angelo’s little, cheap one which had fallen to the floor. “So—it was you—you, all the time, Angelo! I might have known. An inside job—yes, it was an inside job, all right. I knew that from the start, and I’ve had you watched all along. You hear! And now I’ve caught you—you!”

The little Italian shook and shivered, blinking in the blinding light, glancing fearfully from Peter’s face to the small, blue-black instrument of death which pointed so unerringly at his pounding heart.

“Don’ shoot! Don’ shoot, Boss,” he pleaded in a sobbing whisper. “Me do noding, noding only justa lika you say! Oh, Santa Maria dell’ Angeli, put up dat damma gun!”

Still fixing the trembling wretch with menacing

eyes, Peter slowly dropped his hand and slid his small automatic into the side pocket of his coat.

“I’ll shoot you through my pocket if you make a move, Angelo,” he hissed. “And I’d rather do it than not, see! Make no mistake about that. Now, come with me,” and he seized the janitor roughly by the wrist.

“Ug-g-gh!” Angelo cringed and caught Peter’s grasping hand with his left. “Take hol’ funder up,” he begged. “Gotta da sore arm, me—ver’ bad.”

Peter loosened his fingers just enough to disclose a long, scarcely healed cut across the inner side of the man’s wrist. He looked sharply at it and at Angelo, then shifted his hold higher on the forearm.

“I don’t know why you think I ought to be tender of your feelings, you scoundrel,” he said, gruffly. “But come in where we can get a light. I want to have a heart-to-heart talk with you, you lying, thieving, murdering—Hell! What’s that?”

As he turned, Peter’s foot struck hard against something which lay upon the floor.

“Datta da silv’!” Angelo wailed, softly. “Come putta him back—me.”

“Pick it up and bring it in here,” ordered Peter, sternly. “And don’t try any tricks. I warn you——”

Obediently, the Italian stooped, and picking up a rather large package, roughly wrapped in newspapers, preceded Peter to the dining room, where Peter swiftly lit the gas.

“Now,” said Peter, “you sit there. And keep your hands above the table.”

He drew up a chair on the opposite side, and ostentatiously laid his automatic close beside him upon the dusty mahogany.

“Now, Angelo,” he said, grimly, “you’re going to tell me how you killed Miss Mary Blake.”

“Ah, Jesus Maria!” cried the little Italian, in agony, lifting his trembling, shaking hands in the air, and looking at Peter with staring, panic-stricken eyes. “Me no killa! Me! Mees Mary she go ’way—sist’ go ’way! Nobod’ here. Nobod’! Me no killa nobod’ no time!”

Peter’s eyes narrowed as he looked fixedly at the man’s face.

“Did she tell you she was going away?—Miss Mary, did she tell you?” he asked, earnestly.

Angelo nodded quickly, and then shook his head.

“What does that mean?” asked Peter, angrily. “Yes or no? You’re a liar anyway, Angelo. You said you thought they were still here. Now which is it? Yes or no?”

“Non, no! Mees Mary’ sist’, she tella me—Mees Anne!”

“And what did she tell you? Think carefully, Angelo. Your life depends on what you say now. You’ve got to convince me that you didn’t murder one or both of them. I can send you to the chair if you don’t, see! Take your time, but tell me exactly what Miss Anne said.”

The little Italian, thus tenderly admonished, was a pitiful sight to see. His brown face was a sickly colour, like that of cocoa with too much milk in it. His forehead was covered with beads of perspiration to which his dark hair clung when he removed the shaking hand which had been pressed against it. His heart may have been in his throat, for he gulped once or twice, spasmodically, before he spoke:

“Tella you da trut’ now, Boss, by da great San Michaelo an alla da Ange’.” He crossed himself fervently, and raised his tense hand high in the air. “Tella da trut’, now, sure! Tella da lie once, me—but no any more. Dis da trut’. *Si. Si.*”

He dropped his hand. Peter leaned forward, fixing him with unwinking eyes.

“All right,” said Peter. “But you’ve got to make good this time, understand. Come across with it. What did Miss Anne say, and when was it?”

“On Sunday morn’, early, ver’ early. Mees Anne she come down w’en me wash vestabula. She say, ‘Angelo, my sist’ she go ’way las’ night. Me go to-day. May stay longa time. Da rent he is pay t’ree mont’. Me fixa ev’t’ing. No needa you go inna da flat. Ev’t’ing alla righta.’” He threw his hands out, palms upward. “An’ dat alla she say. But she no leava da house till five in da eve’. See her in tax’ wit’ bigga da tronk. She go herself, an’ sist’ she go night before. Me no killa eith’ one, me! No! No! Believa me—no! Madre de Dio, Boss, me tella da trut’!”

“That sounds all right, Angelo. You say it easy,” said Peter, still glowering. “But I’ve only your word for it. And how about all that blood we found, spilled around the apartment, and that big spot on Miss Mary’s scarf? How can you account for——”

“Signore! Boss! Listen!” broke in the excited Italian. Jumping up from his chair, he supported his trembling body with one hand, pressed flat down, upon the table, while with the other he gesticulated wildly. “Me tella you ’bout alla blood, how he come. He was alla from dis, from dis!” He raised his right hand, and with the left struck the wounded wrist rapidly, many times. “He cutta himself on wind’ in kitch’.”

“On the window in the kitchen. That’s a likely story,” said Peter, in apparent disgust. “Why, that was a month ago, Angelo. It would have healed twice over in that time, if——”

“Non. No!” Angelo interrupted, passionately. “He not come well. He stay sick—all swella up. He hurta lika hell. I t’ink he punishmen’—*Si, si!*”

“Punishment for what, Angelo? If you didn’t murder Miss Blake, what was there to be punished for?”

“Non. No!” Angelo reiterated the agitated disclaimer. “No murd’! No murd’! Me tella da trut’!”

“You said that before,” said Peter, sternly.

“Ye-ah, ye-ah! Alla right! Now I tella. See, Boss. Listen! Me gotta sick wife. Maria. *Si, si.*

She ver', ver' sick, longa time. Doc' say she mus' go countree. Me no gotta da mon'—dat's easy. How me getta da mon'? No good. Can do noding, me. Den, Boss, listen. Night before Mees Anne an' Mees Mary go 'way me hava da dream—longa dream——” His voice dropped, and his eyes were wide. “All inna da dream me see nombre—7741. Jus' lika dat—7741. . . . Inna da morn' me tella Maria. She say mus' be nombre for lot'——”

“Lot?” asked Peter, frowning, and then, a light breaking—“Lottery—you mean lottery?”

“*Si! Si! Si!*” Many nods. “*Si, lot!* Me t'ink lika Maria, ye-ah, me t'ink lucky nombre! But,” a shrug, “no gotta da mon'. Den, alla same day, dat ver' same Sunday—Mees Anne, she go 'way. . . . Mees Anne gone—sist' gone—me t'ink—lil' dev' whisp'—me bor' some lil' t'ings—no steala, bor', see? I can—what you say?—pawna da silv', da ringa, da necklace, da pin—an' bringa back w'en lucky nombre come, I maka some mon', see?”

“I see what you mean me to think,” said Peter, gruffly. “Go on.”

“So-o—me come up here—late—alla dark, but me hava da lil' flasha light, see? Come in—looka all 'roun'—in desk, in draw', alla place. . . . Noding—no ringa, no necklace, no pin. . . . Come outa here—fin' silv', lotta silv' in draw' an' onna da top. Me maka him in bund', queek, queek! Me getta him all-read'! Den, presto, I t'ink—Mees Blake, she come back—maybe somebod' come befora

da lot' is draw. Who gotta da key but Angelo? Den gotta fright', me, Boss. Gotta ver' bada fright'. . . . T'ink, queek! queek!—me feex so dey t'ink t'ief, he come fire-'scape. Sure. *Si, si*, ha! Go in kitch'—me slip queek over by wind'—den! S-s-h! Me hear biga, longa ringa, downstair' on bell! Me stop—listen. Know I mus' go down, queek!—Hava da big bun' of silv' onna da arm!—What I do? All afraid dey catch Angelo! Mus' feex so dey t'ink t'ief come from da outside, see? . . . Queek, queek—me smasha da wind' right by da lock—so! Diavolo! feel cutta on da wris'. Grab him queek—go run inna da hall. Me know he isa bleed', so pull outa da bandan'—he red, so no can see da bleed—wind him roun' tight!—All I do, fas', fas'—alla tima da bell ring—

“I know it is da groun' floor. Dat lady, she alla time forgetta da key—so I run down queek, an' leava da bun' in dark onna da stair. . . . I go open da door—it is da groun' floor, lika I know—an' t'inka me alla right now!—Santa Maria!” It was a bitter wail, and overcome by a succession of troubles, the poor wretch laid his head down on the table and sobbed.

The grim austerity of Peter's face softened.

“And what is this, Angelo?” he asked, touching the newspaper-wrapped package which was lying beside him on the table.

“Da silv', da silv'!” moaned Angelo, without raising his head. “Me tella you, it was da silv'.”

Peter drew the package toward him and pulled off the string which held it fast, disclosing a number of pieces of flat silver and a small coffee service.

“Is it all here?” asked Peter, quietly.

The rough head upon the table moved up and down in assent.

“But how did you get it back?” Peter’s voice had taken a new tone. “I thought you lost out when the lottery was drawn.”

Angelo was too far gone to notice this evidence of Peter’s omniscience.

“Playa da same nombre twice—two day’,” muttered Angelo. “Firs’ day—lose; secon’ day he come alla right, lika dream.”

“And as soon as you won you took the silver out of hock and brought it back?”

Again the silent nod.

Peter sat back in his chair and looked for a long time at the rough, bowed head. At last he spoke, and in his voice was a half-quizzical kindness.

“You’re a great rascal, Angelo, and a stupid fool to boot, and you’ve made me a lot of trouble, dammit. But I believe you’ve told me the truth at last——”

Angelo raised his stricken head. A gleam of something like hope shone in his eyes.

“Yes,” Peter went on, “I believe you’ve told me the truth, and I will say it’s helped to clear things up. But now, listen. One thing more—how did Miss Blake’s scarf come to be stained with blood, and how

did it happen to be just where we found it?" Peter was thinking aloud more than he was addressing Angelo. "It fell down behind the trunk, and nobody noticed it. The cabman pulled it along the hall when it caught on the bottom of the trunk, and he shook, or kicked it loose, just at the hall door. . . . And afterward, that same night, you chanced to walk over it, and it must have caught—that sort of soft, fringy thing would catch on anything—a rough place on your shoe, perhaps. . . . You dragged it across the sill, and when the door shut, it held the scarf fast. . . . But the blood on it? If you bound up your wrist I don't quite see——"

"*Si, si!*" cried Angelo. "But looka, looka, Boss. Listen! Me feex da bandan' 'roun' him—so, an' hol' him fas', but w'en I comma to da door, mus' use bot' han', see? Lika dis——" He made the motion of turning two knobs at once, and Peter remembered that it was necessary to do this in order to open the hall door. "I mus' let him go, an' da blood, he jumpa out an' fall onna da door. You showa me da place, Boss! You no remember?"

"And it fell on the scarf just below," Peter nodded, slowly. "Yes, I see. I guess that's right, Angelo. I guess that explains—well, and that's that," he added, rising to his feet. "Put the silver back where you found it, Angelo—so—that the way it was? All right. Now," he laid his hand heavily on the Italian's shoulder, "come with me."

Angelo drew a deep sigh, and slowly twisted his head to look up into Peter's face. What he saw there caused him to start—to cry out—and then, with head bent before the array of silver he had been honest enough to redeem, to sob out his heart in a long string of thankful, reverent profanity.

CHAPTER XXV

A HIGH WALL

THE doors of the great columned façade of the New York Public Library were scarcely opened, on the following day, when a young man with eager Irish blue eyes and very red hair might have been, and probably was, seen, at least by the doorkeeper, making his way toward the Periodical Room.

Probably, too, he was remembered for some little time by the young librarian in charge of the magazines, for not only was he of exceptionally pleasant address, but his wants, though definite, were astonishingly varied.

He spent some time in going over the magazines which were brought to him, made several notes in a little worn leather-covered book, and once, when he referred back to places he had marked with cards in two previously examined periodicals, and compared them with the one in his hand, there was a gleam of satisfaction, triumph, perhaps, in his eye.

At last he rose, and passing into the newspaper department, consulted a file of the New York *Planet* for May. After that he left the library and proceeded, as rapidly as possible, to a small office building near Broadway, where the sign "Clancy and

O'Malley" was modestly displayed in bronze upon the side post of the entrance.

"Well, O'Malley," said Peter, plunging into his partner's private office, "I've had one hell of a time!"

"That so?" said the old man, looking up with a hearty, welcoming glance into the face of his young colleague. "I got your wire, Pete. Glad you fixed it up with Morris. Sit down, lad, and tell me all about it."

"Gee, O'Malley, I'd like to," said Peter, wearily, "but I can't tell yet whether I'll have the time. Oh, there you are, Jack," he broke off as a boy came into the room with several time-tables in his hand. "That's quick work, son. Now, let's see——"

He dropped down upon a chair beside the desk, and began running through the time-tables at a rapid rate.

"Are you off again, Pete?" asked O'Malley, anxiously. "You look done up, boy. I know your wire said that you might have to——"

"Yes, and it spoke the truth," said Peter, hurriedly. "I've got to get the next train for Chicago that will connect with one going down to Cordenham. Cordenham," he repeated, running his finger down a column of names. "Here we are—Cordenham——"

"For the love of Mike, Peter," said O'Malley, "what the devil, and where the devil is Cordenham?"

"I don't know yet what the devil it may turn out to be," said Peter, still intent on the time-table, "but Cordenham is a little place somewhere south of

Chicago—and it's destined to be famous one of these days if what I've learned this morning turns out to be true. You can take it from me—— Oh—leave Chicago," he was reading now, "leave Chicago one-twenty-six, arrive Cordenham four-seventeen. That can't be right—nearly three hours—yes, it is. Leave Chicago one-twenty-six, arrive Cordenham four-seventeen. Gee! Must be a rotten little road. . . . I say, O'Malley, how would you rather go to Chicago?"

"In a coffin," replied the confirmed and prejudiced New Yorker, promptly.

Peter chuckled. "No, but I mean it, O'Malley. Which is the best train?"

"The one that takes longest to go and the one that's quickest coming back," answered O'Malley, and Peter was forced to decide his route from his own, more limited experience.

He chose a train which left the Pennsylvania Station at eleven o'clock, and reached Chicago at nine on the following morning. This would give him ample leeway, in case the Western train was late, to make the connection for Cordenham. After his last night's experience he wished to run no risk.

When he had made his decision, he threw the timetables down on the desk and turned to his partner.

"I only have a little time, O'Malley," he said, "but I want to put you wise to something I turned up last night. It was a peach of a piece of luck, and explains a lot, as you'll see for yourself."

And he proceeded rapidly to relate the story of his having surprised Angelo in Miss Blake's apartment.

"I put the screws on him after I'd caught him," Peter said. "You may be sure of that, O'Malley. I made him believe that I thought he'd murdered one or both of the sisters."

"But you couldn't have thought that, Peter," interrupted O'Malley, quickly.

"No, of course not," answered Peter, readily. "I sized the situation up pretty well, from the minute he told me there was silver in the bundle he was carrying. But I wanted to get the dope straight, and the best way, of course, was to scare him into it, poor devil." Then he went on to tell of Angelo's confession. "I let him off easy," he said, in conclusion, "what else could I do, O'Malley? If either of us had a wife who was desperately ill, and we needed the money for her—well, all I said to him was, 'It's a poor bet, Angelo. Nobody gets away with it for long. Promise me you'll never try it on again.' And he promised by all the saints in the calendar. . . . And that was that."

O'Malley was silent for a moment when Peter had finished. Then he said:

"So—our murder theory's knocked into a cocked hat. At least it seems that way to me, Pete. Doesn't it to you?"

"Well," said Peter, eyeing his partner meditatively, "you mustn't forget that the only person seen

to leave the apartment took with her a big trunk. That the large sum at the bank could be drawn out by Anne as well as by Mary—that, apparently, only Anne's clothes are gone—oh—and all the rest of it. We've only solved the one problem, that is, as to why there was blood in several places in the apartment and why the rooms were all upset."

"Do you believe Angelo's story, Pete?" asked O'Malley, earnestly.

"I do." The answer was sharp and to the point. "I think even an old hand like you, O'Malley, would have been convinced. I think you may take it for granted that the only blood spilled was Angelo's. . . . Now, where do you go from there?"

"Are you kidding me, Pete?" asked O'Malley, with a little twinkle in his sharp old eyes. "Are you trying to draw me so as to get the laugh on the old man? Have you got something new, boy?" eagerly. "You have, I can see it in your eye! What is it, Pete? What——"

"Oh, lord!" After a hasty glance at his watch Peter had jumped to his feet. "I've got to clear out this minute, O'Malley," he said. "I've just time to get my ticket and catch the train. Send up a prayer that I'll get a night's rest on the train, if you think you have any pull up above, for I need it, old top. Yes, I was kidding you." He laid his hand on the old man's broad shoulder. "I've got something, and I think it's good, but I can't tell you till

I'm sure. It may be a pipe dream, after all. And, anyway, I can't stop now. Good-bye, old scout. Wish me luck."

"Good-bye and good luck, Pete," said O'Malley, gravely, as their hands met. "I'll be thinking about you, boy. Good-bye."

He turned back when Peter, in his tumultuous exit, slammed the door.

"Youth," he said, shaking his gray head. "Youth and courage—and brains—brains!"

A day and a night and almost another day passed uneventfully for Captain O'Malley. For Peter the time was marked only by the click and rumble of swiftly moving wheels, the roaring and shrieking of the train; a few hours' respite in Chicago, and then on again, more slowly and with lessened comfort, in the dingy, red plush-covered seat of a day coach, counting the little stations as they passed—and, at last—Cordenham.

At the tiny way-station he alighted from the train and proceeded to make his inquiries.

"Oh, yes. You can find it easy enough," said the old expressman in answer to Peter's question, eyeing him a trifle curiously, Peter thought. "It's about half a mile straight down the road. You'll know it by the high wall all 'round the place. The old Mayhew place, we calls it. It was a crank of an Englishman that built it. He died a spell ago. But you'll know it by the stone wall. You can't miss it. It's

only about half a mile, and ask for the Mayhew place. Anybody can tell you."

With these explicit directions Peter set off down the flat and lonely road. The day had been hot and breathless, but now, in the early evening, a cooling breeze was springing up, rippling the fields of standing grain and rustling in the trees along the dusty road. Peter bared his head to the refreshing air, and strode forward with swift and determined steps.

He passed few houses along the way, and fewer people. One of these, a bright-looking boy, in torn overalls, he stopped and asked if he was on the right road to the Mayhew place.

The answer was a nod and a pointing finger, and the boy passed on, kicking up the soft dust with his bare feet.

Just after this Peter crossed a wooden bridge over a thread of water running between wide, eroded banks, and came to a small, dark wood. The wood passed, he came suddenly upon a long stretch of high stone wall, incongruous in such a setting, and behind the wall, at some little distance, he could see the top of an old stone house which appeared more incongruous still, for it was on the lines of an old English castle, with high, crenelated walls. On the top of the roof, most incongruous of all, was a modern super-structure, largely of glass, and, as Peter looked, a strange, brilliant light of a queer bluish purple flared out through the windows—died down—flared once again—and was gone.

Peter muttered something to himself, and went on along the wall, stopping quietly on the closely trimmed grass which lay between it and the road. Soon he came to a closed gate, a high gate of heavy wrought-iron work. He paused here only long enough to look down a well-kept driveway shaded with dark trees and thickly planted with shrubbery. There was not a soul in sight. Then he continued on about five hundred feet to the visible end of the wall.

He had hoped that the wall had simply been built to ensure privacy from the road, as is the case in so many American homes, but he found, to his disappointment, that the wall continued at right angles, probably enclosing the entire estate.

Peter was rather at a loss how to proceed. He had wished, if possible, to make sure of one point before coming out into the open, and the height of the wall bade fair to defeat even the possibility of accomplishing his purpose.

He stood for a moment at the corner thinking how best to proceed. As he glanced about him, he noticed a rough though well-worn path leading away from the road and, following the turn of the wall, through a wood of tall trees and thick underbrush.

"I'll take a chance," thought Peter, and quietly entered the path.

He had walked far enough to be certain, though he could not see it, that he had passed the house, when suddenly he came to a stop. On the other side of

the wall he could hear voices. Two women's voices he made them out to be, though he could not hear the words. It was the first sign of life he had found around the odd, lonely place.

"I *will* have a look in," he thought, determinedly, and glancing swiftly about, he saw a tree tall enough and near enough to the wall for his purpose.

Quick and light as a panther, he was up among the leafy branches in a second. He had chosen well; for below him, clear to view, were the lawns and garden of the queer old house.

Just beneath, to the left of the tree he had chosen, were the two women whose voices he had heard. One was dressed in the crisp white of a nurse. The other Peter could not see well, for she was in a wheel chair, the back of which was toward the wall. He could hear the voices a little more distinctly now, though the words were still indistinguishable. The nurse's voice had the usual cheerful professional ring, the other spoke in a high, thin, "society" drawl. Both voices dimmed as the women moved slowly away across the lawn.

"Nothing doing," thought Peter to himself, and immediately losing interest in the couple who had been so near him his quick eyes roamed farther afield.

On the lawns and about the garden, gay with flowers, several other figures moved. They were mostly in couples, a nurse, and with her another woman, some walking about and some being wheeled in chairs.

At some distance from the rest one woman walked alone, a slender figure dressed in black. She walked swiftly, with long, even, purposeful steps. She was opposite the house and moving away from Peter when he first saw her. The instant he caught sight of her there was no one else in all the grounds for Peter. His eyes followed her every movement. She reached the shrubbery which closed the view on the opposite side of the lawn. Peter held his breath. Would she enter the shrubbery and disappear from sight? No. She had turned, and was coming slowly toward him.

When the dark figure again reached the house, Peter had another bad moment, but, without pause, like one who paces a deck for exercise, the woman rapidly advanced. Nearer and nearer she came. Now she skirted the end of a flower bed and was on the lawn just beneath Peter's tree.

In his excitement, Peter's foot slipped a little, and a small, dead branch broke with a sharp snap. The woman looked up—and Peter knew—knew without shadow of doubt, that he was looking into the face of the woman he had so long and so earnestly sought—the woman who called herself—Anne Blake.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE WOMAN SHULTZE

THE hours which followed Peter's abrupt and unexpected departure from Fennimore Park passed long and heavily for Donald Morris. He waited for nearly twenty-four hours, hoping to get a wire, and all the while, though he was physically better for the change, his mind chafed at his distance from the scene of action.

Soon after Peter had gone Morris had motored up the hill to Mrs. Rutherford's cottage, only to be told that she was suffering from a bad headache and had gone to bed. In the morning he had called her up on the telephone, to inquire as to her health, and to ask if he might see her, but found, to his great surprise, that she had gone to town on the morning train.

Disappointed and anxious, he felt that he could stand it no longer. The momentary collapse, of which his sister had taken advantage to get him away from town for a time, was practically over. He felt considerably better, but the uncertainty and inaction, combined with Peter's odd behaviour and Mrs. Rutherford's sudden return to New York, made him feel that he must follow them. He had no means

of knowing that Clancy was no longer there. He hoped to see him not later than that evening, for he had determined to take the noon train from Tollenville.

“I’ll be just as comfortable at home as I am here, Helena,” he said, when she remonstrated with him. “I’m taking Hobbs back with me and he’ll look out for me as well as you could. Don’t worry, dear, I’ll be much better off at home.”

He kissed her, gently, and went out to the car which was already waiting to take him to the train.

On the evening of the day, then, when Peter arrived at Cordenham, but at a somewhat later hour, Donald Morris reached New York. Late as it was, his first action on arriving was to call Peter’s office on the telephone, and he was lucky enough to find O’Malley still there.

The old man told him briefly of Peter’s sudden departure from the city, and added:

“He was in a devil of a rush, and I don’t, myself, know what he’s up to, Mr. Morris. But he did give me some information which I think would interest you. I’ve got to go out just now, but I’ll be back here by eight o’clock. Lot of work I must make up—and if you could find it convenient to come over after dinner—or I’ll come to your house——”

“No, no. I’ll come to you,” said Morris, hastily. “I can, perfectly well, and I think I’d rather be there than anywhere else. Clancy probably thinks I’m

still at Fennimore Park, and you'll be likely to get any news there is before I would. I'll come over a little after eight. It's good of you to take the time——”

“Not at all, not at all,” said O'Malley, cordially. “Wish I had some real good news for you—not that this isn't good, as far as it goes——”

Donald therefore made ready to leave his sister's house in Gramercy Park a little before eight that evening. Somewhat encouraged by O'Malley's cheerful tone, and the fact that news, good news as far as it went, awaited him, he had dined with more appetite than he had known for several days. As the hands of the tall clock in the hall marked the hour of seven-forty-five, having noted from his window that the taxi he had summoned to take him to O'Malley's office was already drawn up at the curb, he descended the stairs from his room, expecting to leave the house at once.

He had seen the cabman run up the steps, and after a short colloquy with someone at the door, return to his cab. He was surprised, therefore, as he passed his sister's apartments on the second floor, to hear the sound of voices in the hall below. Since he had dismissed his valet for the night, he knew that, besides himself, there was no one in the house except an old coloured woman who had been in the family for two generations, and who always took charge of the house when the family were away for the summer.

Fearing that it might be a casual friend who would detain him, Donald waited, out of sight, in the upper hall, until he could determine who the unexpected caller might be. As he paused to listen, he heard Susan's soft old voice:

"I don' think you can see Mistah Morris to-night," it said. "He jus' goin' out."

"But I must see him." It was a woman's voice, sharp, thin, and nasal. "He'll want to see me when he knows who I come from. You tell him, and tell him quick, that there's a lady here waiting to see him that can tell him something he wants, most particular, to know. Tell him that I seen the piece in the paper Monday and that I know where the lady is. You tell him that, and——"

"It's all right, Susan," cried Donald, running swiftly down the stairs. "I'll see her. Just go out and tell the cabman to wait, please." As Susan quietly disappeared, he spoke quickly, breathlessly, to the other woman. "Come in here," he said, leading the way into a small, formal reception room at the right of the hall, and switching on the lights as he entered.

The woman followed obediently. She was a large, stout, middle-aged person, dressed elaborately in a cheap imitation of the latest mode. There were many gaudy rings on her ungloved hands, and in her ears were earrings of such size and weight as to make one fear for her equilibrium should she lose one of them. Her face, which must once have been hand-

some in a common way, was slack-skinned and puffy, and covered heavily with powder and rouge. As she walked, her fluttering, scanty garments exhaled a heavy perfume.

Donald was too much excited to be seriously affected by her unprepossessing appearance.

“Please sit down,” he said, quickly, “and tell me what you have to say.”

She sank luxuriously into a soft-cushioned chair, and with a keen, observant eye took in her surroundings and the appearance of the man who remained standing before her.

“You’re Mr. Morris—Mr. Donald Morris?” she asked, looking sharply up at him. “Yes. Well, then, I’ll tell you—and if there’s anything in it——”

“There’ll be something in it for you,” Donald hastily assured her, “if you can give me the information I’m looking for.”

“How much?” asked the woman, tersely. Her eyes were little points of avaricious light.

Donald recoiled a little, and hesitated. The woman, keenly observant, hastened to retrieve her mistake.

“Not that I care for myself,” she said, softening her nasal voice. “It’s the poor thing I’m thinking of. She needs care and attention that I can’t afford to give her, but if some of her friends would come across I could do for her as any one would wish to, the poor, beautiful young thing.”

“Of whom are you speaking?” asked Donald.

rendered somewhat cautious, in spite of his keen desire to hear more.

“Why, you know, of course, Mr. Morris. Who would I be speaking of to you like this? It’s Miss Mary Blake I’m talking about, though I wasn’t sure, myself, at first, and never would have known at all, if it hadn’t been for that piece in the paper.”

“Mary! Miss Blake?” cried Donald, starting forward. “Do you mean to tell me you really know where she is?”

“I certainly do, Mr. Morris,” said the woman, confidently. “Why, she’s been in my house for about a month now. She come the first of June, or a day or two before.”

“Mary!” muttered Donald to himself. “Here, all this time we’ve been looking—hunting the country over——” Aloud he said, eagerly: “And she’s there now?”

“She is that, Mr. Morris. I come straight from her.”

“Did she send you to me?” The question was anxious, but filled with wondering hope.

“Well,” said the woman, slightly evasive, “you can’t exactly say she sent me. Not exactly. But she’ll be all right when she sees you—I’m sure of that.”

“All right?” asked Donald, quickly. “What do you mean by ‘all right’? Is she ill? Is anything the matter——”

“Now, now, don’t get excited, Mr. Morris,” she

interrupted, soothingly. "She's all right. She's well and comfortable. Just a little queer, maybe, but nothing to speak of, and when she sees you——"

"But I don't understand——" Morris began, anxiously.

"No, probably you don't, and I'd better tell you the whole story," said the woman, easily. "I'd better spill the whole dope, and then you'll see just how the land lays."

Donald sank into a chair near by and the woman, leaning forward, spoke confidentially:

"My name's Shultze, Mrs. Gertrude Shultze, though all my friends call me 'Trudie'," she said, in what she evidently considered a society manner. "I keep a very classy boarding house for ladies and gentlemen at 111 West Forty —— Street. Well, that's me. Now, about the first of June, a young lady comes to my house, a very beautiful young lady, I think you'll agree, Mr. Morris. She's very quiet, respectable, and ladylike"—Donald shuddered—"keeps herself to herself, and at first she paid right along, as a real lady should. I thought, from the start-off, that her manner was a bit strange, but I didn't really begin to notice nothing till just a week or so ago. I hadn't seen much of her, to tell you the truth, Mr. Morris, for the simple reason that she paid to have her meals sent up until a short time ago, and after that, she only took the room, and had her meals out, I suppose, though I never seen her go out that I can remember, but, of course, I'm that busy

what with all the gentlemen taking up my time and that——”

Donald was frowning heavily. His interruption was rather brusque:

“What name did this young lady give when she came to your house, Mrs.—Mrs. Shultze?”

“Oh, didn’t I tell you? She gave the name of Curwood.”

Donald caught his breath. “Curwood?” he asked, sharply, and, remembering the name Clancy had discovered at Hobart Falls, he repeated it again—“Curwood.”

“Of course I’m aware now that it wasn’t her real name,” the woman went on, knowingly. “As soon as I seen her photo in the paper, it set me thinking. I couldn’t get it out of me head, and the more I thought, the surer I was. But this child don’t go off half-cocked, believe me! So, thinks I to myself, I know a place where they sells pictures of actors and actresses, and I slipped over to Broadway this very afternoon, and I buys three of Mary Blake, all different views. I studies ’em, you may be sure, and when I goes up to see if she can come across with the bit of money she’s owing me, I give her the once over—and there ain’t no doubt left in my mind. There couldn’t be. It’s Miss Mary Blake, all right, all right”—confidently. “You can put all your money on that horse, Mr. Morris.”

Donald Morris shut his teeth together. He could not bear to think what this month had been to Mary,

shut up in the sort of house this woman would have. Why had she hidden there? What reason could there have been? As to her identity, he had no doubt. The woman, Shultze, was sharp and keen enough—and there was the name—Curwood. It was an unusual name, and Clancy was sure that his information was correct. No. There could be no doubt.

It was horrible to his sensitive nature to be obliged to make use of this woman, but he saw no other way. Something she had said——

“I think you told me you noticed something strange in the lady’s manner, Mrs. Shultze.” His voice was abrupt though he strove to speak in his usual tone. “Just what did you mean by that?”

“Why,” the woman hesitated slightly, though Donald was under the impression that she was not trying to be evasive, “I don’t quite know how to put it, Mr. Morris, but between friends, it seemed to me that Miss Blake—or Miss Curwood, as she calls herself—has kind of—lost her memory.”

“Just how do you mean?” asked Donald, groaning inwardly. If the woman was right, if Mary’s mind were affected——

“She doesn’t even seem to remember who I am,” answered Mrs. Shultze, quickly. “And when I asked who her friends were, and if some of ’em mightn’t stake her for awhile, she looked at me, kind of blank-like, and she says, putting her hand to her head, like this, ‘Friends—friends? I don’t believe I have a friend in the world.’ And you know, Mr.

Morris, that's all nonsense. Of course a young lady like her's bound to have all the friends she wants. And then, when I found out who she was, why, 'twas only natural I should come to the gentleman the paper mentioned, thinking that any one that knew the poor thing would be glad to help her. But, if you don't see your way to that," her raised eyebrows and lifted chin were slightly aggressive, "why, the paper give the name of her manager, Mr. Frederick Jones, and I can go to him. I don't believe he's no tightwad, and I guess——"

Donald Morris leaped to his feet. His subsequent actions were almost automatic, so poignant were his emotions.

"Wait one moment, Mrs. Shultze," he said, hurriedly. "I'll go with you at once. Just wait one moment."

He dashed through the hall and into a big library at the back of the house. Seating himself at a telephone desk, he called O'Malley. When the connection was made:

"I can't come to your office to-night, Captain O'Malley." He spoke rapidly, and the old man at the other end of the wire caught the excitement in his tone.

"Why, what's up, Mr. Morris?" he asked, quickly.

"I know where Miss Blake is, O'Malley," Donald cried. "She's staying with a woman who's here in the house now. I'm going to her at once. I——"

"Don't you want me to go with you, Mr. Morris?"

I can as well as not, and I'll keep in the background if you say so. Don't you think it would be advisable? Where is she?"

"The address is 111 West Forty — Street. . . ."

O'Malley whistled under his breath, but Donald did not hear him. "I don't quite know——" He hesitated.

"Pick me up at the northwest corner of Broadway and Thirty-ninth Street," said O'Malley, crisply. "I'll be there before you are and it won't cause any delay. If you don't need me, I'll just stay in the cab."

"All right, O'Malley. I think I'll be glad to have you along," Donald agreed, and with a caution born of his estimate of Mrs. Gertrude Shultze, he added, swiftly, "Don't mention your—your profession before the person you'll find in the cab with me. I'll say you're a friend of Miss Blake's."

"I'm on," said O'Malley, briefly, and Morris hung up the receiver.

He went swiftly back to the reception room.

"I'm ready, Mrs. Shultze," he said.

The woman gave him a long, calculating glance, and followed to the waiting cab.

CHAPTER XXVII

111 WEST FORTY — STREET

GERTRUDE SHULTZE listened attentively while Donald instructed the cabman to go to number 111 West Forty — Street, but to stop on the way and pick up another passenger on the northwest corner of Thirty-ninth Street. She looked at him shrewdly from the corner of her eye as the cab started forward, and after a moment she said:

“Who’s your friend, Mr. Morris? I shouldn’t think Miss Blake would be any too crazy to have a crowd——”

“It’s a friend of Miss Blake’s,” said Morris, shortly. “Someone who is almost as interested in finding her as I am.”

“Oh,” said the woman, and remained silent for several minutes, much to Donald’s relief.

She started talking again (it was obvious that she could not be silent for long), but she said nothing of any consequence to Donald. Her chatter annoyed him because it gave him no time to think, and he was relieved when he saw O’Malley’s bulky old figure standing at the appointed place.

O’Malley jumped in, with surprising agility for one of his age and figure, almost before the cab came to

a standstill, and after being introduced to Mrs. Shultze, he bore the brunt of the conversation. Even then, Donald had little opportunity for concentrated thought for his attention was distracted by the clever way in which the old man drew the woman out, making an excellent impression by the interest he showed in her personal concerns. The adaptable old fellow had no difficulty, apparently, in meeting her on her own ground, and in the few minutes which elapsed before the cab stopped in front of her house he had gained such headway that she made no difficulty whatever about his accompanying Mr. Morris.

With her own latch-key she opened the door of the big, somewhat shabby house, and requested the gentlemen to follow her upstairs.

Donald hesitated to go up unannounced, but she imperatively overruled his objections.

“Your best bet is to go in sudden, Mr. Morris,” she said. “It may be a shock, but if you ask me, I think a shock is just what the poor thing needs.”

O'Malley cast a sharp, questioning look from one to the other, and Mrs. Shultze told him at once of Miss Blake's loss of memory. When he understood:

“I think she's right, Mr. Morris,” he said. “I've had some experience—I mean I've seen a case of this sort, and it was just the shock of seeing someone well known in the past that brought the memory back. It's worth trying.”

Donald agreed to that, and all three, Mrs. Shultze

in the lead, went up the heavily carpeted, dusty stairs. When they reached the top floor, she pointed to a door and placing her finger on her lips, knocked softly.

“Who’s there?”

Donald started forward at the sound of the voice within the room. O’Malley put his hand on Donald’s arm.

“Wait,” he said, in a low whisper.

“It’s only me, dearie,” said Mrs. Shultze in honeyed accents. She tried the door, and finding it locked, added more sweetly still, “Won’t you let me in?”

There was no answer except the sound of a key turning in a lock. Mrs. Shultze cast a warning glance at the two men, opened the door and stepped quickly inside, leaving it ajar.

“How are you to-night, dearie?”

“I’m very well, I think. I’m not sure. What is it you want? You’ve been here before about something, but what is it, I can’t remember.”

At the first words Donald started again, convulsively. He stepped close to the door and listened intently to that voice, that beloved voice, now so uncertain, so strangely altered, yet the same—the same.

“Oh, forget it, dearie,” Mrs. Shultze had responded at once, with exaggerated cheerfulness. “We won’t talk about that now. I’ve brought a friend to see you, sweetie. That’s the way little Trudie looks out for them she takes a fancy to. I’ve brought an old

friend——” There was a low murmur and the woman, evidently replying to it, said: “You look all right, dearie. He won’t mind.” Donald knew that she had turned toward the door, for her voice was louder as she added, “Come in, Mr. Morris.”

“I’ll stay here,” whispered O’Malley in Donald’s ear. “Leave the door open. I’ll keep out of sight.”

Scarcely hearing, with heart beating wildly, Donald pushed open the door.

“Mary,” he cried, chokingly. “Mary! At last!”

She was seated on the other side of a small table, leaning slightly forward, her cheek resting on her right hand, in a position poignantly familiar; but the exquisite face—oh, how changed and ravaged it was! Only the great, gold-gray eyes burned with the old fire.

Donald cried out again, “Mary!” and threw himself on his knees beside her. Mrs. Shultze, keeping herself well in the background, watched with calculating eyes.

O’Malley, in the hall, saw the woman at the table draw back, turning sidewise in her chair.

“I—I don’t understand——” The voice was sweet, low, and troubled, “Ought I to know you? I can’t think——” She passed her hand across her forehead, pushing back the lovely curves of soft dark hair.

“Oh, Mary,” there was heart-break in the tone, “don’t you remember? It’s Donald. Donald. You must——”

“I can’t remember,” she said, gently drawing her rather worn silk *négligée* closer about her. “There was someone—someone once, who spoke to me like that. . . . But it was long ago—long ago, I think.” She looked at the upturned face steadily, trying to thread her way back through the darkness of her mind. “Who was it? There have been so many—so many faces. . . . They come and go—in dreams—but they have no names. . . . They’re like scenes in a play. The curtain comes down . . . and it’s all dark—all dark——” The beautiful voice trailed off into silence, and again she dropped her cheek on her hand.

“But, Mary, Mary——” Donald strove, in agony, to regain her attention by the reiteration of her name.

She roused herself a little, and looked at him again.

“Why do you call me that?” she asked, confusedly. “My name is Rosamond, Rosamond Curwood.”

“I know, dear,” he replied, gently. “But you were called Mary on the stage. Try to remember. Mary Blake. That was the name you used. Can’t you——”

She shook her head, slowly, wearily.

“Don’t—don’t confuse me,” she said. “I can remember that my name is Rosamond Curwood. It’s all I can remember. Don’t take that away from me.”

But Donald could not give up. Again and again

he tried to call back to her remembrance something out of the past. But she only shook her head, blankly, becoming more and more troubled and uncertain, until at last he dared not go on. With a hopeless gesture he rose to his feet, and before he had reached the door, she had relapsed into the old position, her eyes staring absently before her.

In passing, Donald made a sign to Mrs. Shultze, and together they left the room, softly closing the door upon the sad and apparently hopeless figure.

Without a word, O'Malley put his kind old hand under Morris's arm, and realizing the young man's need of physical as well as moral support, he led him quickly down the stairs, Mrs. Shultze following close behind.

As soon as they reached the ground floor O'Malley said:

"There's just one thing to be done, Mr. Morris, and the quicker, the better. What we want is a doctor—an alienist"—he felt Donald wince—"I know it's hard, but it's got to be faced. And you know there's always hope in a case of this kind. Most of 'em recover sooner or later, I think. But we want a specialist, the best in town, and I would suggest——"

"Stevens," Donald interrupted, with eagerness. "I'd rather have John Stevens than any one else."

"The very man I was thinking of," agreed O'Malley. "There's nobody like him in the country."

“And he’s a personal friend of mine, too,” said Donald. “There’s hardly anything we wouldn’t do for each other, and——”

“Got a telephone here?” O’Malley turned sharply to Mrs. Shultze, who had been silently listening.

“Oh, yes, sir. Just at the back of the hall.” She pointed, and O’Malley started toward the instrument which could be dimly seen in the shadow of the stair.

Donald checked him. “It would be better for me. It’s late, but he’ll come for me,” he said, and went quickly to the telephone.

While he was talking, Mrs. Shultze came up close to O’Malley, and spoke in a soft, wheedling voice.

“You won’t let Mr. Morris forget that it was me that found Miss Blake for him, will you?” she said. “A gentleman like him would be sure to be grateful, I should think. And there’s the matter of a week’s rent, too. Of course, there’s no hurry about it, now I know who her friends are, but you’ll see he doesn’t forget, like an old dear, won’t you? I’d hate to be speaking to him myself, when the poor young man’s in such trouble and all.”

“You needn’t worry, Mrs. Shultze,” said O’Malley, gruffly. “You’ll be paid and paid well, if you’re good to the poor young thing upstairs.”

“Oh, you can be sure of that, sir,” she said, beaming at him. “I’ll treat her’s if she was my own daughter, I mean. Yes, sir. Anything that Trudie Shultze can do for her is the same as done. I’ll——”

“Stevens is coming right down. He’ll be here in a few minutes,” said Donald, advancing quickly from the other end of the hall.

“Won’t you gentlemen come into my parlour and wait there?” said Mrs. Shultze, hospitably. “It’s right here handy, on the ground floor.”

Donald shook his head and O’Malley declined politely.

“We’ll be all right here,” he said, motioning to a plush-covered settle which stood against the wall. “And we won’t keep you any longer, Mrs. Shultze.”

He said this pointedly, and the woman, realizing that she had no further excuse for lingering, only said sweetly, “If you need me, I’ll be right on the job”; and went down the hall, disappearing through a door at the back.

They were forced to recall her, however, when the doctor came.

“Better have some woman, Don. I hadn’t time to get hold of a nurse,” he said. “Better have the woman of the house, especially since the patient is used to seeing her.”

So it was that Mrs. Shultze, as well as Donald and O’Malley, accompanied the doctor to the top floor. The woman knocked softly and went in alone. Presently she came back to the door, and beckoned to Doctor Stevens. Morris and O’Malley remained in the hall. The door was partly open, and they could hear the doctor’s quiet, assured voice and an occasional low reply. In a little while they heard

him speak quickly to Mrs. Shultze, and both of them came into the hall. The doctor was frowning, angrily.

“When did she have something to eat?” he asked, sharply, jerking his head in the direction of the room they had just left. “Speak up, woman. When did she eat last?”

“I—I don’t know.” Mrs. Shultze faltered under the doctor’s steady glare. “She isn’t boarding here any longer. She just has the room, and she owes me for that for more’n a week. I never thought——”

“I guess that’s the truth, anyway,” said Doctor Stevens, angrily. “I don’t believe you ever did before, but for God’s sake, think now and think quick. Have you any bouillon—any milk in the house? The child’s starving. I don’t believe she’s had a mouthful for days. We’ll have to see about the other trouble later. She must have food now, and quickly. Don’t stand there, woman. Get down to your kitchen as fast as the Lord’ll let you, and bring me milk, some raw eggs, a little sherry or brandy——”

“My God!” groaned Trudie Shultze. “There ain’t been a drop of sherry or brandy in the house for two months—I got some gin——”

“Get the other things quick,” said O’Malley. “Gin won’t do as well as——” With a funny little look he slipped his hand into a rear pocket. “It’s the best, Doctor.” The hand came out, holding a small flask. “I can vouch for it. The best French brandy in New York.”

“Good!” said the doctor, with a little gleam in the eye he turned on O’Malley. “Now, Don, you go to the nearest restaurant and get——” He reeled off a list of light and delicate but nourishing edibles. “You won’t need to hurry. She’ll do with the egg-nog for an hour at least. So get ’em good, and take your time.”

“All right,” said Donald, grateful for the opportunity for action. “I’ll be back as quickly as I can make it. But, John——”

“Yes?”

“Can’t we take her out of this beastly hole? Now, at once! I can’t bear to think of her with that hyena of a woman—who left her to starve—to starve! God! When I think of it——”

“The woman will treat her well if she’s paid,” said O’Malley. “I can vouch for that, at least.”

“Then pay her! For God’s sake, pay her!” cried Donald, pulling a roll of bills from his pocket and thrusting them into O’Malley’s hands.

“Better leave her here, in any case, for to-night, Don,” advised Doctor Stevens, quietly. “I can get her into my sanitarium to-morrow, if you’d like that.” Donald nodded, eagerly. “And I’ll get a nurse for her here, right away, but I think you’d better sweeten up this woman——”

“This’ll do it,” said O’Malley, peeling off a bill of large denomination, and handing the rest of the money back to Donald. “This will do for a starter, with the hope of benefits to follow.”

“So go ahead, Don, and don’t worry about anything here,” said the doctor, comfortingly. “I’m not going to leave till I see things are right.”

Donald, after a grateful look at John Stevens and O’Malley, and an anxious, longing glance at the closed door, ran rapidly down the stairs.

When O’Malley reached his comfortable, old-fashioned bachelor quarters, late that night, there was an almost unacknowledged feeling of half-amused satisfaction in his mind. The situation was painful enough, to be sure, and he was full of sympathy for young Morris, but, in spite of all, there was a certain compensation in the fact that he had put one over on Pete. While he had not been exactly instrumental in finding Mary Blake, he had been on the job when she was found—and that was incontestably comforting to his sporty old heart. He was, therefore, in a somewhat mixed frame of mind as he undressed, but above all other considerations one thought was uppermost:

“I’ll have news for you, Pete, my lad, when you get back from your wild-goose chase,” he said to himself, as he stooped, ponderously, to untie his shoes.

And just then the telephone, which was installed in the corner of his bedroom, rang out loudly in the midnight stillness.

He muttered an impatient word as he kicked off a shoe. “If it’s the wrong number again, I’ll give that

operator the devil," he thought, hastily crossing to the telephone.

"Is this Captain James O'Malley?" asked the voice in the instrument, and at his gruff response it continued, "Telegram for you."

"All right," said O'Malley. "Shoot."

"Got the goods——"

"What!" cried O'Malley. "Repeat that, please."

"Got—the—goods'——" the voice reiterated, with bored distinctness. "Meet us, Penn. Station, Saturday, eleven-forty-five from Chicago. Say nothing yet to D. M.' Signed 'Pete.' Got that?"

"Penn. Station, eleven-forty-five from Chicago, Saturday," repeated O'Malley, slowly. "Yes. I've got it. Thanks."

He hung up the receiver. "Saturday—that's the day after to-morrow," he considered, and sat down heavily on a chair.

"Us, meet *us*——"

"Now, what in hell has Pete turned up?" he went on, wonderingly, half aloud. "What—in—hell——"

CHAPTER XXVIII

DONALD MORRIS UNDERSTANDS

IT CHANCED that O'Malley had little difficulty in following Peter's instructions in regard to Donald Morris, for they had but a few minutes' private conversation together during the next day, and O'Malley cleverly filled the time by reporting Peter's discovery of the Italian, Angelo Russo, in Miss Blake's apartment, and the subsequent confession, which practically explained the condition in which the apartment was found.

Donald listened to the recital with little of the interest he would have felt two days before. His whole mind was occupied with the discovery they had made on the previous night, and his heart was wrung by the fact that, though Doctor Stevens had reported his patient to be physically much improved, she still insisted that she knew no other name than Rosamond Curwood, had no memory whatever of the past, and showed not the slightest sign of recognition when Donald approached her.

As early in the morning as possible she was removed to Doctor Stevens's private sanitarium. She accepted, quietly and unquestioningly, all the arrangements which were made for her comfort, and

appeared grateful for the consideration shown her, to a certain extent, but it was all evidently like a dream to her, and her manner remained absent and listless.

All that day and the morning of the next Donald spent in the sanitarium, or at his home in Gramercy Park, within reach of the telephone, hoping, longing for news, but none came.

At two o'clock on Saturday, as he was rising from an untasted luncheon, he was summoned to the telephone by John Stevens, who told him, with evident sympathy, that there had been no change whatever but that he was preparing to try an experiment that afternoon.

"And I don't want you, Don. Understand?" he said, firmly. "You can't be of any assistance, and you'd much better stay where you are. I'll 'phone you the instant I want you, but it won't be until five o'clock, anyway. I promise to let you know then, or soon after. And, Don," he concluded, with a queer note in his voice, "there is hope, boy. More than hope for you, I firmly believe. Be patient—and trust me."

In a whirlwind of anxiety and emotion Donald spent that afternoon, pacing back and forth, back and forth, the length of the great house. Listening for the telephone's insistent ring, wondering, hoping, doubting, and hoping again.

At last he felt that he could bear the period of enforced inaction no longer. He would go up to the sanitarium, he decided, and spend that last, agoniz-

ing half hour before five o'clock on the spot. There could be no harm, he argued, in waiting downstairs in the reception room. And if there was news—good news——

He summoned a cab in haste, and drove rapidly to the sanitarium, which was on West Seventy-sixth Street.

An extraordinarily neat maid answered his ring.

“Doctor Stevens is in the house somewhere,” she told him, “with one of the patients upstairs. I don't think he can be disturbed just now,” apologetically.

“No, no,” said Donald, quickly. “I wouldn't bother him on any account. I'll just wait here, in the reception room, if I may, till he comes down.”

Accordingly, he passed into the pleasantly furnished room, to the right of the hall—and waited—waited with every tautened nerve stretched, it seemed, to the breaking point. Though there were many books lying about, he could not read, he could not even remain seated for more than a moment at a time. Restlessly, he paced about, touching various things on the mantelpiece and table, not knowing why he picked them up, or noticing when he put them down. And all the while he was listening—listening for he knew not what.

The big, broad, sunny house was very still. Once or twice a soft footfall on one of the floors above brought his heart into his mouth, but the sound passed away into silence, and no one went up or down the stairs. Again, for the twentieth time, he looked

at his watch—five minutes of five—and John had promised——

Suddenly he heard a slight commotion at the top of the house, and he turned swiftly toward the door, his clenched hands pressed tightly together. Mary was on that floor he knew, and he took a step forward. Now he could faintly hear voices, several voices, speaking very low, and once he imagined he heard a woman's sob—then steps upon the stairs.

He waited, breathless, keeping himself in hand with an iron grip, making no sound.

Then, at the head of the lower flight of stairs, he heard Doctor Stevens's voice. He was speaking to someone behind him, and there was a ring in his tone which caused Donald's heart to leap up and his blood to pound in his temples. He took one step nearer the door, and at that instant Doctor Stevens saw him.

"Don!" he exclaimed, with a curious note of anger—almost of alarm—in his voice. "Don, I told you not to come here! Not to come here on any account! I thought I made it plain—— Oh!——"

The expression on Donald's face had altered from confusion and surprise to blinding, dazzling amazement. He was not conscious that there was any one present save that one figure among several figures coming down the stairs. He cried out—he threw out his arms——

"Mary!" he said, in a choking whisper. "You know me! You know me, at last!" And then, with a sudden cry, he recoiled in horror.

The woman who, at the mention of his name, had turned toward him with a gasp of surprise, had, at the same instant, stepped full into the light. In her great clear eyes there were love, pain, fear—hope—and an agonizing tenderness.

Swiftly, she put up her hand and covered the right side of her face. But he had seen—had seen, upon the smooth curve of chin and neck, a great red mark—like the print of a bloody hand.

He stood aghast, amazed. All his senses reeled. “Anne!” he cried, incredulous, staring—“Anne!”

“Oh, Donald,” she moaned, “I didn’t mean it to be like this, dear. I didn’t mean it to be like this!”

“Mary’s voice,” he muttered, still staring at her. “And Mary’s face, all except the mark—the mark was on Anne’s face—Clancy told me. You are *Anne*?”

She bowed her head in silence. Tears filled her glorious eyes.

“And Mary—is upstairs,” he breathed. “And yet, when you speak, it’s impossible not to believe——”

She shook her head.

“It’s my sister, Rosamond, up there,” she faltered. “My poor, misguided little sister that I—lost years ago—that I loved more than anything I had left in the world—until I saw you. . . . I never heard of her—never saw her again until to-day. . . . You never saw her, Donald. You never saw her until—was it yesterday? . . . We always looked very much alike—except——” She pressed her

hand closer against her cheek. "It was no wonder, seeing her as you did, that you mistook her for——"

"I can't understand." Donald gripped his head with both hands, gazing at her with strained, bewildered eyes. "You *are* Anne?"

"Yes," she answered, sadly. "I am Anne Curwood. . . . Forgive me. Oh, forgive me, dear!" She stretched out her hands, pleadingly. "I had planned it all so differently. You can hardly forgive me now. But try to understand. There is no Mary Blake. There never has been. It was I—Anne. There is no one but Anne."

"No one but—Anne," he repeated, incredulous.

"I tried to tell you before—before I went away—as soon as I knew that you—that you cared, Don. As soon as I was sure. . . . I started to write it in the letter I left for you—and I hadn't the courage. . . . 'My sister Anne, with whom I live——' I remember I wrote that far, and crossed it out. I was going to say—I should have said—'My sister Anne, with whom I live, is a myth. There is no such person living. I have lived alone, through all these years, and played two parts——'"

He gazed at her, now, with comprehension dawning in his eyes. His very soul shuddered at the fearful disfigurement which seemed like a desecration of her wonderful face. His intense, passionate love of all that was beautiful and perfect wrought in him, for a moment, a feeling of horror. A fearful, almost physical, recoil.

And if it was thus with him, he thought, wildly, what must it have been to her—sensitive, high-strung, with magnificent gifts—a handicap which, in her chosen profession, could never be overcome—unless——

In a blinding flash he saw the reason for her deception of all the world—a deception which, lastly, had involved himself. He understood, with sure, keen insight, what her temptation must have been—and, understanding, he forgave.

The expression of his eyes altered, was changed, illuminated, with a love transcending all things. Again he stretched out his arms:

“Mary,” he whispered. “Mary——”

With a little cry of joy unspeakable she started toward him—and stopped.

“No, no,” she said, softly. “Not yet. Not yet, my beloved. I have suffered—suffered, to come to you clean. I said I would come to you clean, or not at all.”

Then, to his amazement, she drew a handkerchief from her breast and turned away from him to a small mirror which hung against the wall.

A moment—and she faced him.

Radiant, glorified love was in her eyes—and on her perfect face there was no mark or blemish.

CHAPTER XXIX

KATE RUTHERFORD RELIEVES HER MIND

IT WAS your own fault, Don. Your own fault, boy," Doctor Stevens remarked, with partly assumed annoyance. "If you'd waited at home until I 'phoned, you never would have seen Miss Blake with that dreadful thing on her face. It was part of the experiment I was trying upstairs."

He looked across his private office at a stately figure ensconced in the largest chair in the room. "It was Mrs. Rutherford who suggested how it could be managed, and she made Miss Blake up with her own fair hands. And Mr. Clancy backed me up in style." He glanced aside at Peter who was sitting near him.

"But," said Donald, looking down into the glowing face so near to his, as he and Mary (as he insisted on calling her) sat together upon a couch. "But I can't realize it all, somehow. The—mark, dear," he clasped her hand tenderly, "was a birthmark, wasn't it? I thought that it was practically impossible——"

"And I thought so, too, Donald," she interrupted. "For the last few years I've hunted up every report—all the experiments of this kind that have been

tried, for I wanted—oh, I wanted so to be rid of the hideous, dreadful thing. I saw one of the best specialists here last fall. He said something might be done by skin-grafting, but that it would be a long and painful experiment. I was playing then, of course, and couldn't give up the time. . . . And then, just after that, there was an article in a silly magazine called *Beauty*, which told of the wonderful discovery, made by a doctor, in a little place near Chicago named Cordenham. It was a new kind of ray—which destroyed the colouring matter in the skin. I subscribed for the magazine at once, but there were only two more notices and they weren't very convincing. In the meantime I went to the library and looked for more authentic reports in all the current medical journals. I found the experiments of Doctor Witherspoon mentioned, but the articles seemed to indicate that nothing conclusive had been done at that time. . . . Oh, Donald, can you imagine with what anxious longing I watched for the new numbers of that magazine to appear?"

"And when they did come out, Mr. Morris," Peter interjected, "Miss Blake cut out some of the articles and saved them. That was how I traced her."

"You found them in her apartment?" asked Donald, quickly. "You didn't tell me that."

"No," answered Peter, promptly, "for the simple reason that I didn't find the articles. It was like the old story of the fisherman who was about to take a

party out among some dangerous rocks. When asked if he knew where the submerged rocks were, he said, 'I don't know where they be, but I know where they ain't.' Well, that was my case. I found the magazines that the articles had been cut from pretty early in the game, but I didn't see any significance in that till I knew—well, most of the facts. Then I went back to the apartment and made a note of every magazine from which anything had been clipped, the date and page. After that, I went to the library—and found that the articles all pointed one way. Directly or indirectly, they pointed to Doctor Witherspoon and Cordenham."

"You're all right, Clancy," said Donald with sincerity. "You certainly are a wonder."

Peter looked a little sheepish. "It would have been more to the point if I'd made my discovery a little earlier," he said. "Miss Blake was almost ready to come back to town when I found her."

"Yes, Donald," said Mary, looking at him with concern in her beautiful eyes. "Doctor Witherspoon was almost ready to let me go, at last. Oh, my dear, if I had known it would be so long I never would have done what I did—have left you in suspense all these weeks. I would have told you everything, and taken the risk. . . . But the very last thing I found—it was in the *Planet*, just a few days before I went away—an article which gave a full description of a wonderful cure made by Doctor Witherspoon. It took only three days, and was absolutely

successful. . . . From previous accounts in the medical journals, I knew that the operation was considered dangerous—but I pinned my faith to the last thing I'd learned—and hoped.

“I'd made up my mind to take the risk, anyway. I had my plans all laid, and that Saturday morning I drew enough money to see me through. . . . My only question was whether or not to tell you. . . . And then, that last night—that last night, dear, my courage failed utterly. When you spoke of ‘my sister Anne’ with such confidence in me in your dear voice—oh, Donald, every time you mentioned her, I felt—I can't tell you how beneath contempt I felt. . . . To deceive you! Oh, Donald——”

“Don't—don't think of it, dearest,” he said, gently. “I understand, I understand.”

“Oh, you're wonderful, wonderful,” she said, with tears in her eyes. “But it would all have been different if I had realized. Mine was a bad case, Donald; the position and size of the mark, and my nervous exhaustion, they all told against me, and after the very first treatment I collapsed utterly. I knew nothing for days and days. . . . They kept me under anæsthetics and the treatment went on. . . . When I came fully to myself, it was so near the end, I was so close to achieving my heart's desire, that I made up my mind to wait—just a little while, dear—to regain my strength, and then come back and tell you—everything. . . . Oh, Don-

ald," she paused, and looked deep into his eyes, "I wonder if you can realize, quite, what the whole thing meant to me. I knew you loved me, but I also knew how you shrank from anything ugly, abnormal. I had good reason to know. . . . And the thing had been a nightmare to me all my life long; I could not bear it any longer. . . . And, if the operation was not to be successful, I had made up my mind, Donald, that I would never, never see you again. . . . That Mary Blake should vanish. That there should be no one left but Anne, and that she would never be found, for—there would be nothing left in life for her, and she would have been glad to lay it down——"

"Oh, Mary, Mary!" he cried, and unheeding the others in the room, he threw his arms about her and held her fast. "It wouldn't have mattered if the experiment had failed, dear. I love you, *you*—you must have seen, just now, out there on the stairs—you must have realized that it would have made no difference——"

"Oh, yes, Donald, yes," she sobbed. "I saw—I saw it all, and I can't help being a little glad to know that not even that hideous disfigurement could make a difference. But I never would have caused you that pain, not even for my poor sister's sake, if I'd had any idea——"

"And that's what made me so angry with you, Don," said Doctor Stevens, striving to break the emotional tension of the scene. "As I said before, if

you'd only waited as I told you, you'd have been saved a lot. You see, Don," he explained, "I have a very strong professional interest in the case upstairs, and there was just one chance in a million of helping Miss Rosamond Curwood to regain her memory, and the Lord put it into my hand. I do think, now, it was that good old chap, O'Malley, who first made the suggestion. It seems he had an experience once with a similar case, where the patient was confronted with someone well—intimately—known in the past."

"And this is how it happened just as it did, Mr. Morris," Peter broke in, eagerly. "I'd wired O'Malley and Mrs. Rutherford, from Cordenham, to meet us at the Penn. Station. Miss Blake didn't want me to telegraph you. She was afraid of the shock, and it would have been impossible to explain—well, everything—you see, in a telegram. . . . We got in about noon, and O'Malley told us of the discovery you'd made. We compared notes, and Miss Blake was certain that the person you'd found must be her twin sister, Rosamond, who'd disappeared years ago. Miss Blake was naturally all broken up over the whole thing, and O'Malley had a hunch that if the two sisters were suddenly brought together, it might bring Rosamond to herself. He called up Doctor Stevens on his own, while we were going over to Mrs. Rutherford's hotel, where we were going to ask you to come; and, by the time we'd seen to Miss Blake's luggage and arrived at the hotel, Doctor

Stevens was there, waiting for us. He was keen on making the experiment, and was neither to hold nor to bind," he glanced, quizzically, at the doctor, "until he'd tried it out. Both Miss Blake and I wanted to get you first, but he said he wasn't at all satisfied with Miss Curwood's condition, and that the thing should be tried at once if it was to be any good. Miss Blake became alarmed at that, and agreed. But then we struck a snag; Miss Rosamond would never know her sister without the—the mark, which had been successfully removed. Then Mrs. Rutherford came to the front. She said, 'Why not paint it on again?' And that she did to perfection, I will say——"

"So I telephoned to keep you out of the way, Don," added Doctor Stevens, "and you upset all our plans."

"But you haven't told me yet whether you were successful," said Donald, who, with Mary's hand held close in his, had followed the conversation intently. "Were they right, Mary? And is your sister——"

She shook her head, sadly.

"She knew me, Donald. She recognized me—but she remembers nothing, nothing at all, that has happened since we were little children together. Perhaps—oh, perhaps, Donald, it is just as well. She has no painful memories, and her life must have been—hard, I'm afraid. Doctor Stevens says——"

"We can hope. We can always hope," said the doctor, comfortingly; but by the look in his eyes,

Donald Morris knew that there was little hope, in this world, for Rosamond Curwood.

"We'll take care of her, Mary," Donald said, gently. "We'll take care of her together, dear."

There was a moment's pause, and then Mrs. Rutherford spoke, for almost the first time.

"Look here, Don," she said, in her deep, commanding voice. "I don't want you to blame Anne for having played a part to the world."

"I don't, Aunt Kate," he said, looking not at her, but at Mary. "I understand——"

"But that's just it," interrupted the old lady, quickly. "You understand a part. That's all. I know you've a lively imagination, and I will say, Don, that you're—that you're a pretty satisfactory person—take it all in all. . . . But I want you to understand that it was I who put Anne up to the whole thing, and I guess I'll need a few prayers if my poor old soul is ever to get out of Purgatory."

"Don't talk that way, Aunt Kate," said Donald, smiling at her perturbed face.

"All right, Don," she agreed, "but I want you to know, just the same, how the whole thing came about. This clever young countryman of mine," with an appreciative glance at Peter, "figured out the whole affair. His knowledge of it came to me like a bolt from the blue. I'd never seen him, you know, till you introduced him to me in Fennimore Park, and you can, perhaps, imagine my surprise when he told me who he was, and what he was doing. I was

startled nearly out of my wits, and when, without more ado, he plunged into the very middle of the situation, and announced, in a whisper that would have done credit to Henry Irving: ‘Mrs. Rutherford, there has never been, in that apartment in New York, but one person—and her name is Anne Curwood,’ I was simply taken completely off my feet.”

She glanced about to note the effect of these lines, dramatically uttered, then she went on:

“I told him, after that, what I’m going to tell you all now—you who know some of the facts. . . . It was all my fault. . . . I found Anne slaving her youth away in menial tasks—and I found out that she was the daughter of my old friend, Winthrop Curwood.”

“Winthrop Curwood of the old Athenæum Company?” asked Donald, with keen interest. “Why, I’ve heard my mother speak of him often. She knew his people in England.”

“Yes, Don. That’s the man. But please don’t interrupt. I want to get the whole thing off my mind. My conscience has been worrying me so, in the last few days, that I must clear it, and take all the blame. . . . This is how it was—I discovered, almost at once, that Anne had inherited her father’s wonderful gifts, and that he had given her a perfectly marvellous training. . . . He had become blind, stone blind, poor, poor Win—and teaching her had been his one pleasure and recreation. He’d done wonders for her, and probably had great hopes

for her future. He never knew—Anne told me all this. With tears in her eyes, she said that she could never bring herself to tell him that there would be no possible chance for her on the stage. . . . When she told me that—I had a great idea. I took her up to my room, and I made her up with my own hands. Nobody was ever more skilful at that than Kate Rohan.” There was pride in the deep old voice. “I made her look at herself in the glass. You could see the birthmark in the bright daylight a little, not very much. But when I drew the blinds and turned on the electric lights, there wasn’t a trace—not a trace.

“Then I thought it all out. . . . She couldn’t be seen in the daytime, in a bright light, without the defect being discovered. And if it was once known, it would be talked about, and I could see that Anne would never be able to stand the kind of notoriety it would bring her. She was too terribly sensitive about it. . . . I was at my wits’ end for quite a while, and then—suddenly—I saw a way out. . . .

“I was determined that her wonderful gifts should not be lost to the world, and I got Arthur Quinn to come up to Fennimore Park. I made Anne act for him, after I’d made her up as she ought to look on the stage. He was crazy—mad about her, and when I saw how he felt, I told him everything, including my plan—which was that she should be two persons instead of one. . . . I even picked out a name

for her—Mary, for my own mother, and Blake, which was part of her mother's name—Blakeslie. . . . So—as Mary Blake she was to astonish and delight the world; and as Anne Blake she was to pursue her daily round, without any subterfuge other than the change of name, to agree with that of her 'sister.' And, too, I suggested that she play the part, while she was about it—play Mary with spirit and pride, standing tall and straight, as she always did when she was taken out of herself—and let Anne be as she was: plainly dressed, timid, quiet, retiring; stooping a little as she walked or stood. . . . To me, it was an added touch to the dramatic possibilities of the situation, but Anne looked at the whole thing with distaste and it took some time to persuade her—but, at last, she yielded.

“I arranged everything for her with Arthur Quinn, contracts and all. We even managed to have her photographed so that the photographer didn't suspect. That was rather ticklish business, for the camera sometimes sees what the eye doesn't. But we took care of the lighting, and the results were perfectly satisfactory.

“In the meantime, I found the apartment in Waverly Place, and we furnished it together.”

“And had special lighting installed,” put in Peter, eagerly.

“Ah, you noticed that, did you, Mr. Clancy?” The old, young eyes flashed him a quick look. “Yes. You see, she had to make up for 'Mary Blake' at

home, and we were taking no chances with the gas, which was already there. Anne was staying at my hotel, as my companion, so all that was easily accomplished. . . . Then, when she began making money, we had to get banking accommodations for her. Arthur Quinn managed that. He took her to the Scoville Bank, where he had an account, and introduced her."

"Twice?" asked Peter, quickly.

"Yes," replied Mrs. Rutherford, giving him a keen glance. "He waited for a cloudy day, when there would be artificial light in the bank, and then he took 'Mary Blake,' and helped her open an account. That was just in case of emergency. We'd planned that Anne should be the one who would make deposits, as a general thing, and draw out money."

"So you made the account subject, under all conditions, to the order of either of the sisters," said Peter, eagerly. "I found that out almost the first thing; and it did give me a fearful jolt, let me tell you." He did not think it necessary to explain why, and went on at once—"I saw the signature card at that time, and there was something about the appearance of the two names which struck me as being peculiar. Miss Mary's writing was large and—fluent—sort of—while Miss Anne's was small, and slanted the wrong way. At the first glance they didn't look a bit alike, but— Well, I didn't think so much about it at the time, but later

I happened to see a letter written by Anne Curwood to an old friend of hers named Walter Lord, up in Hobart Falls. I—I made an opportunity to examine it carefully, and I found that, while it was signed ‘Anne,’ the writing was, unmistakably, Mary’s. . . . Then I began to sit up and take notice. . . .

“Here were twin sisters, who, in childhood—I had seen photographs of both—looked almost exactly alike—save for one thing. . . . I learned, from this Walter Lord, that both children had exceptional dramatic talent; but also, to my surprise, that Anne was much the cleverer of the two. . . . I knew that Rosamond had disappeared when the girls were about eighteen years old, and had never been heard of since, but that Anne had gone away, later, with a Mrs. Rutherford. That’s how I first got hold of your name, Mrs. Rutherford.”

All were following Peter’s recital with breathless interest. Kate Rutherford nodded at the mention of her name, and Peter continued:

“And, on top of all this, I found that letter to Walter Lord, and knew—yes, I was absolutely certain, that the two signatures at the bank had been made by the same hand. . . . Well, I thought to myself, what in the world does that mean?”

“Then I went carefully over the facts we’d turned up in New York. . . . Mary Blake was a brilliant, successful actress, but she knew no one, personally, so far as we could find out, except Mr.

Morris and, to quote the Italian janitor, 'a fine, grand lady' who sometimes came to the apartment. There was, too, her present manager, Frederick Jones. But he didn't appear to know her, except professionally. . . . From him I found out that she associated with none of the members of the company—and something else, which came back to me later—the curious fact that she always rehearsed in costume—with a full make-up. . . . She went out only in the daytime when it was absolutely necessary, was always heavily veiled, and always took a cab. . . .

"But, on the other hand, Anne was well known to the janitor, to various tradesmen in the neighbourhood, and to the people at the bank. They all described her to me, and the descriptions were practically identical. . . .

"I remember that no one had ever spoken of the two sisters as if they had been seen at the same time. . . . That only one of them, Anne, had left the least trace when (as we all thought at the time) both of them disappeared. . . . That there were many of Mary's clothes left in the apartment and practically none of Anne's. . . .

"And always, and everywhere, I heard of Anne's fearful handicap. . . . I thought of it this way and that. . . . And there was only one theory that would exactly fit all the facts. It seemed absurd to me when it first flashed into my mind—and that was at the time when I realized that only one

person had signed at the bank. You will remember, Mr. Morris, that I had seen part of a letter to you signed 'Mary', but the writing was identical with that of Walter Lord's letter from 'Anne'—and then it came back to me that I had noticed a remarkable similarity in the two signatures at the bank, and I was sure—sure!"

"It seemed impossible, but I figured it all out that day, on my way from Hobart Falls to Fennimore Park. . . . And when I heard Mrs. Rutherford's voice, downstairs, there 'at your sister's house, Mr. Morris, you remember—and realized that it was the same voice that had called Anne Blake on the morning of our discovery in Waverly Place—and that the name was the same as that of the lady who had taken Anne Curwood away from Fennimore Park—well, you can imagine my feelings!"

"And it was only on guess-work, young man, that you made me disclose a secret I'd kept for years!" said Kate Rutherford, severely. "If I'd known that——"

"No you wouldn't, Mrs. Rutherford," Peter interposed, eagerly. "You wouldn't have kept it to yourself. You know you were too much alarmed by Mr. Morris's appearance to keep the matter secret any longer."

"And, after all, Anne," said Kate Rutherford, holding out her hands in a gesture almost of supplication, "it was my secret, in a way. At least I was responsible. It was my fault altogether. You

would never have gone into it at all but for me. I had such a hard time persuading you——”

“And I never would have been persuaded, Donald,” a soft voice interrupted. “I think I would never have been persuaded but for one thing, which Mrs. Rutherford never knew.” For a moment Mary Blake looked into the eyes of her lover. Then she went on: “You don’t remember, dear, I know. It was long, long ago, that first time I saw you——”

“At my sister’s house in Gramercy Park,” said Donald.

“No, dear. Long before that. You were riding through Hobart Falls with someone—a lady—on horseback. . . . You stopped at old Walter Lord’s, you and she, to have him take your pictures. . . . I remember it well.” Her voice was very quiet, full of restrained emotion. “The sunlight on the trees, and on your face. . . . I was there, on the steps, and you saw me—I saw the quick shiver of disgust when you caught sight of my poor face. You closed your eyes for a second—and I went quickly away. . . . You would not remember, but it seared deep into my soul——”

Peter Clancy rose abruptly, and quietly passing over to the window, stood with his back turned to the room. Doctor Stevens unobtrusively joined him, and the two men stood looking out with unseeing eyes. Mrs. Rutherford sat very still. Her great, dark, youthful eyes were full of tears. The two fine young creatures at the other end of the room were

oblivious of all save each other. Anne Curwood was still speaking:

“Afterward, Donald, when I was employed by your sister, in Fennimore Park, I saw you often, but I kept out of sight. I watched you, from behind the curtain at the door, working in your studio there. You were rapt, absorbed. I had little fear that you would ever think of the poor girl who came in to do cleaning. . . . But every line of your face grew familiar to me in those days; in those brief moments that I could snatch from my work—I learned to read your face—I knew when your work was going well, and rejoiced with you—I saw the light in your eyes—your smile—— It was the thought of making something of myself, of being someone—someone you would not shudder to look at, that induced me——”

He turned, and caught her in his arms.

“Mary,” he whispered upon her lips. “Mary!”

THE END





LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



00023182075